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SON *is*
GIVEN

A DAILY READING GUIDE FOR ADVENT



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P R E F A C E

It was the most significant birth in the history of the world. God's promises were being fulfilled. The words of the prophets were coming true. The King from David's line, the longed-for Messiah, the Savior of the world, had come. And He was wrapped in cloths lying in a manger.

Helping you and your family reflect on these glorious truths is the goal of this Advent Guide. Advent (from the Latin *adventus*) means “coming,” for this is the season in which we focus on the *coming* of the Son of God, in the flesh, to rescue sinners like us. Many Christians across the world and throughout history have celebrated Advent as a season of repentance, anticipation, hope, and joy. Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve, December 24. This Advent Guide provides twenty-five days of readings, which will allow you to begin on December 1 and end on Christmas Day.

Each day offers, in addition to a daily Scripture reading, a key takeaway, a brief reflection on the passage, a simple summary of the reading (this may be helpful to read aloud for families), discussion questions (one for adults and older children and one for younger children), a suggestion for prayer, and a suggested passage for further reading. We've also included in the back of this guide a list of memory verses and practical ways for your family to respond to the good news of Christ's coming.

This guide is simply a tool, so feel free to adapt it to fit your particular situation. The end goal is for you and your family to listen to Scripture and rejoice in the God who sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, for the salvation of sinners like us. What better way to spend the Advent season?

David Burnette | EDITOR, RADICAL



Key Takeaway

God's ways are often very different from our ways.

TODAY'S READING

Luke
1:5-7

In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

Brief Reflection

If you were writing a story about history's most important birth, a birth that would cause armies of angels to explode in praise, a birth that would be good news for all the peoples of the world, then the opening scene probably wouldn't include an older woman who was unable to have kids. But, then again, you didn't write the Christmas story. God did.

It looked as if Zechariah and Elizabeth had been forgotten by God, particularly in a culture where children were viewed as a sign of God's blessing. Was there a secret sin they were hiding? Or had God simply abandoned them? *What was the problem with this couple?*

Luke's Gospel tells us the problem wasn't with this couple. Zechariah and Elizabeth were "righteous before God," and they walked "blamelessly." That doesn't mean the couple was perfect,

but it should keep us from concluding that God was punishing them by not providing a child. The years of painful longing were serving another, much greater purpose, though neither Zechariah nor Elizabeth could see it—not yet, at least. We can hear them crying out with the psalmist:

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me? (Psalm 13:1)

Even though this faithful Israelite couple must have *felt* abandoned, God was right there. He saw every tear, and, as we'll soon see, He was conspiring for their joy.

Simple Summary

Zechariah and Elizabeth weren't perfect, but they loved God and obeyed His commands. However, God had not given them a child. And now that Elizabeth was too old to have children, she and her husband probably wondered why God seemed to be silent. They had no idea God was going to use them in His plan to bring salvation to Israel and to the entire world.

Discuss

Have you ever felt as if God was ignoring you or that He had abandoned you? What promises of Scripture do you turn to when you feel this way? (*Ex: Romans 8:28*)

For Kids: Sometimes it seems that no one is listening when we pray. How can we be sure that God hears us? (*Parents, remind your children that we can believe everything God tells us in His Word. He hears the prayers of those who are trusting in Jesus as their Savior—see 1 John 5:13–15.*)

Pray

Thank God that His promises are sure, regardless of how we feel or the circumstances we face.

For Further Reading

Read Psalm 13 to see how the psalmist deals with his feelings of abandonment.

** See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 1–5 on pp. 72–73.*



Key Takeaway

The child promised to Zechariah would be named John, and he would turn many in Israel back to God.

TODAY'S READING

Luke 1:8-17

Now while he [Zechariah] was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

Brief Reflection

It was quiet in Israel. Not an all-is-well kind of quiet, the kind that normally accompanies a time of peace. This was an unsettling kind of quiet. God had stopped speaking to His people through the prophets for several hundred years.

How startling, then, in the midst of this silence, for Zechariah to hear from God. He was told that Elizabeth would bear a son named John in her old age, and this wouldn't be just any son. This son would be filled with the Holy Spirit, even while in Elizabeth's womb! The silence in Israel would soon be broken as all would hear John cry, "Repent!"

Jesus would later call John the greatest of Israel's prophets (Matthew 11:11). Neither Elijah nor Moses had the honor of being the best man to Jesus, the coming Bridegroom of God's people. And to think, this future prophet would be born to a woman who was too old to have children.

Simple Summary

While serving in the temple, Zechariah had an unexpected visitor—an angel of the Lord! The angel told Zechariah that his wife, Elizabeth, would have a child and that this child would have an important part to play in God's plan of salvation. The child's name would be John, and he would be filled with the Holy Spirit. Like the Old Testament prophet Elijah, John would help Israel see that they needed to turn from their sin and trust in God.

Discuss

What does it mean to repent? How is biblical repentance different than simply admitting you've done something wrong? How is

biblical repentance different than trying to earn God's forgiveness?

For Kids: Why do you think it can be so hard to admit that we've done something wrong? What does it mean to turn from your sin? (*Parents, share about a time when you were convicted of your own sin and encourage your children to ask God for forgiveness when they sin.*)

Pray

Ask God to help you confess and turn from your sin as you seek to follow Christ faithfully.

For Further Reading

Read about David's confession and repentance in Psalm 51.

** See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 1–5 on pp. 72–73.*

Our Doubt and God's Faithfulness



Key Takeaway

We are often slow to believe, but God always keeps His promises.

TODAY'S READING

Luke 1:18–23

And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this [that my wife will have a child]? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.” And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, “Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”

Brief Reflection

Have you ever prayed for something for a long time, possibly even years, only to be surprised when the prayer was answered? Maybe the answer didn't come in the way you expected, or perhaps it didn't come as quickly as you had hoped, but for whatever reason, God's answer left you scratching your head.

When Zechariah received the news that his wife would bear a son in her old age, the son for whom the couple had prayed for years, he doubted God. Despite the fact that the news was delivered by an angel from heaven, Zechariah wanted further confirmation. He was slow to believe.

Before we look down our noses at Zechariah, we have to remember how slow we are to believe. We question God's Word because it doesn't fit our own expectations or the world's wisdom. We trust in our own strength instead of the power of the gospel. How soon we forget that the God who speaks to us in His Word is perfectly wise and all-powerful. Gratefully, He is also merciful.

Zechariah's punishment was, in a sense, fitting. Right as God was breaking His silence with Israel, He closed Zechariah's mouth.

Simple Summary

When the angel told Zechariah that his wife was going to have a child, Zechariah doubted God. God punished Zechariah by taking away his ability to speak. We are reminded that we should always believe God's Word, even when it seems impossible. God gave Elizabeth a child, just as He had promised. He can do all things, and He is faithful.

Discuss

Name some teachings in Scripture that you have doubted in the past. What has helped you grow in your faith in God's Word?

For Kids: What do we mean when we say that God is faithful? Is there anything in the Bible that you find difficult to believe? (*Give your kids an example of how the Lord has strengthened your faith in His promises.*)

Pray

Ask God to strengthen your faith so that you might rely on His faithfulness and rest in His promises.

For Further Reading

For more about why we can trust and delight in God's Word, read Psalm 19 and 2 Timothy 3:14–17.

**See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 1–5 on pp. 72–73.*



Key Takeaway

Jesus is the promised King from the family of David, and His kingdom will last forever.

TODAY'S READING

2 Samuel 7:12–14a

When your days are fulfilled and you [King David] lie down with your fathers, I [the Lord] will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.

Brief Reflection

The name of a king from Israel's past shows up throughout the Christmas story. David is that king, and in today's passage, we see why being a son from David's family tree is so significant.

Long before Christ's birth, God made a covenant with David. He promised to raise up one of David's sons and to give this son a kingdom that would last forever. David was also told that one of his sons would build a house for the Lord, and that's exactly what his son Solomon did (1 Kings 6). The temple was built under Solomon's rule, and Israel became more prosperous than it had ever been. However, the sins of Solomon and his sons eventually led God's people into idolatry, and the kingdom split. Another King from David's line would be needed to ensure an eternal dynasty marked by righteousness.

In case you haven't already guessed who ultimately fulfilled God's promise to David, the answer comes in the opening words of the New Testament: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David . . ." (Matthew 1:1). Jesus is the promised son of David, the One whose kingdom will last forever because He has overcome death by His own death and resurrection. The One who was born in Bethlehem is even now reigning at God's right hand, for He is the "ruler of kings on earth" (Revelation 1:5).

Simple Summary

The Lord promised King David that one of his sons would build the Lord a house, or temple. The Lord also promised that one of David's sons would reign as king forever. While Solomon built the Lord a temple, his sin ultimately ruined his reign as king. Only Jesus, the sinless King from David's family tree, the One who conquered death by rising from the dead, could reign over God's people forever.

Discuss

In what ways do we look to earthly rulers for things that only King Jesus can provide?

For Kids: How do we know Jesus will reign forever? (*Remind your children that Jesus is all-powerful and that He has risen from the dead, so His kingdom will never pass away.*)

Pray

Thank Jesus that He rules over us with justice and with mercy.

For Further Reading

Read Psalm 2 and then see how Jesus fulfilled this prophecy about God's Anointed King in Acts 4:23–31.

** See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 1–5 on pp. 72–73.*



Key Takeaway

God sent His Son, the long-promised King of Israel, through a virgin named Mary.

TODAY'S READING

Luke **1:26-33**

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Brief Reflection

The angel Gabriel appeared again, this time to Mary, a young Jewish girl living in a small town called Nazareth. Like her cousin Elizabeth, Mary would also have a child, only this child would not prepare the way for the Messiah (the Spirit-Anointed Deliverer of God's people). This child would be the Messiah!

Mary's child would be called the "Son of the Most High," and He would be given "the throne of his father David." The reference

to David reminds us of God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:13–14 (see the reading on December 4). This son of David would one day conquer sin and death through His resurrection, and He would reign over God's people forever. The King God's people had always needed—though they didn't always realize it—would be born to a virgin from Nazareth.

Unlike other earthly rulers, this King's throne would be established forever. His name, the angel said, would be Jesus.

Simple Summary

Once again God was keeping His word. Long ago He had promised that a king from David's family tree would rule over His people forever, and now that King was about to be born. His name would be Jesus, and He would arrive in an unexpected way. Although Jesus would be called the "Son of the Most High," he would be born to a young virgin from a small town in Israel.

Discuss

How does the birth of Jesus undermine human wisdom and power?

For Kids: Most kings come from a family that is well-known, rich, and powerful. Also, most kings only rule for a short amount of time, or until they die. How is Jesus different than other kings? (*Point out that Jesus was born to a poor family that was not well-known. Mention that, unlike other kings, Jesus is able to rule forever because he has risen from the dead.*)

Pray

Thank God for keeping His promise by sending Jesus, the King who will rule forever.

For Further Reading

Read Jeremiah 33:14–22 and notice God's faithfulness in keeping the promise He made to David.

**See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 1–5 on pp. 72–73.*



Key Takeaway

Jesus fulfilled God's promise to defeat Satan through Eve's offspring.

TODAY'S READING

Genesis 3:14–15

The LORD God said to the serpent,

*“Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.
I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.”*

Brief Reflection

We've already seen that Mary's child would fulfill the promise of an eternal King from David's line. That promise had dominated Israel's hopes for centuries. However, a much older promise was also being fulfilled, and like previous promises, this one had to do with a woman and a child.

Back in Genesis 3, before sin had stained God's good creation, Adam and Eve enjoyed fellowship with God in the garden. The first couple was free to enjoy God, and they were given dominion over His creation. However, Satan (through the serpent) deceived Eve

into eating from the only tree that God had declared off limits. Adam went along with his wife and disobeyed God, and this led to God's curse on creation. In today's reading God declared that there would be war between the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman. Yet, in the midst of this devastation, God gave a hope-filled promise: Eve's offspring would "bruise" the serpent's head and ultimately prevail.

Sin and death continued to reign long after Eve and her children died, and it looked as if God's promise in Genesis 3 was in jeopardy. Even Israel's greatest heroes of the faith could not overcome sin completely. But things were about to change with the birth of Christ. As a great, great, great grandchild of Eve, He would fulfill God's long-standing promise. The head of the serpent would soon be crushed through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Simple Summary

The birth of Jesus fulfilled a very old promise made by God. After Adam and Eve (the first couple) sinned and brought a curse on God's good creation in Genesis 3, God promised to defeat Satan through one of Eve's children. However, the long and terrible reign of sin and death made it look as if God's promise would not come true. But many years later, a great, great grandchild of Eve was born who would fulfill God's promise. His name was Jesus, and He defeated Satan through His perfect life, His death on the cross, and His resurrection.

Discuss

Some Christians view the Bible as a random collection of books. How does today's passage help us see the Bible as a unified story?

How does an understanding of the Old Testament help us grasp the significance of God's salvation in Christ?

For Kids: What promise did God make to Eve in today's passage? What does this promise have to do with Jesus? (*You may need to read Genesis 3:14–15 again and explain to your kids what it means to be an “offspring” of Eve.*)

Pray

Thank God for keeping His promises and for defeating sin and Satan through Christ's saving work.

For Further Reading

Read Romans 5:12–21 to see how the sin of the first Adam is undone by the last Adam, Jesus Christ, and the salvation He accomplished.

** See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 6–10 on pp. 72–73.*



Key Takeaway

God is sovereign and all-powerful, so nothing is impossible with Him.

TODAY'S READING

Luke 1:34–37

And Mary said to the angel, “How will this [the birth of a child] be, since I am a virgin?”

And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.”

Brief Reflection

We can sympathize with Mary's question in today's passage. After all, the idea of a child being born to a virgin sounds impossible. And it is, humanly speaking. But Jesus wasn't just any child.

Even the circumstances of Jesus' birth testify to His greatness. For example, compare Jesus to John, the prophet who would be greater than Moses and Elijah. While John would be *filled* with the Holy Spirit, Jesus would be *conceived* by the Spirit. John's mother was too old to have children, but Jesus' mother did not yet have a husband. Although John would be a privileged prophet, Jesus would be called holy, the Son of God. John would clear a path for the Lord; Jesus was (and is) Lord.

If the angel's announcement to Mary seems unrealistic or

impossible to our ears, then it may be that we have forgotten that we are dealing with the God who spoke the world into existence and who sovereignly upholds it every second of every day. He is not constrained by our human limitations. Nothing is impossible with Him, not even sending the Savior of the world through a young virgin named Mary.

Simple Summary

After being told that she would give birth to a son, Mary wondered how this could be since she didn't have a husband. The angel told Mary that the child would be born by the power of the Holy Spirit and that He would be called holy, the Son of God. Mary needed to be reminded, and so do we, that God is all-powerful. Nothing is too difficult for Him.

Discuss

How would you respond to someone who said, "I could never believe in Christianity because it is scientifically impossible for a virgin to give birth"?

For Kids: If something seems impossible for us, does that mean God can't do it? Why not?

Pray

Thank God that He is all-powerful, and ask Him to help you trust in His strength.

For Further Reading

Read about God's power and other attributes in Psalm 33.

** See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 6–10 on pp. 72–73.*



Key Takeaway

We should submit to God's Word, trusting His wisdom, power, and goodness toward us.

TODAY'S READING

Luke
1:38

And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Brief Reflection

Too often our response to God's Word is based on whether or not *we* think it sounds true or reasonable. Instead of seeing ourselves as servants, we put ourselves in the place of a judge. But that's not how Mary responded to the news that she would, by the power of the Holy Spirit, give birth to a child who would be called the "Son of God."

Although Mary was initially perplexed about how she could give birth—remember, she didn't have a husband!—she submitted, referring to herself as the "servant of the Lord." This should be our response as we hear the truths of God's Word, truths that often cut against the grain of our own assumptions and cultural expectations. We should take the posture of servants who gladly and instinctively trust the wisdom of our Master.

Is this how you receive God's Word? Do you come bowing before a sovereign God whose knowledge and power are infinitely greater than your own, or do you rely on your own wisdom? Do you humble yourself, realizing that God is holy and that you need His mercy? Remember, though, this is not a begrudging submission. For those

who are in Christ, we ought to hear in Scripture the voice of a loving and wise Father who sent His Son to die for us. And we ought to pray that God would give us a heart that, like Mary, gladly submits to His will.

Simple Summary

The angel's announcement that Mary would have a child by the power of the Holy Spirit sounded impossible at first. However, Mary trusted God, referring to herself as the "servant of the Lord." We too should listen to God's Word with humility. We can trust His wisdom, power, and goodness.

Discuss

What circumstances in your life cause you to doubt God's Word? How do you respond to these doubts?

For Kids: What does it mean to listen to God's Word humbly? *(Parents, consider giving your children a biblical or practical example of humility to make the point clear.)*

Pray

Ask God to give you a heart that is humble and receptive to His Word.

For Further Reading

Read more about the right way to receive and respond to God's Word in James 1:19–25.

** See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 6–10 on pp. 72–73.*



Key Takeaway

The law could not solve our sin problem, but God did by sending His Son.

TODAY'S READING

Galatians 4:4–5

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Brief Reflection

In the Old Testament God gave the law to His people, Israel, so that they would know what He was like and know how they ought to live (see Exodus 19–24). This was a unique privilege. However, as Israel's history shows, merely having God's law does not bring redemption. In fact, due to sin's tyranny, relying on the works of the law brings a curse:

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." (Galatians 3:10)

Gratefully, God did what the law could never do—He broke sin's tyranny and provided redemption for His people. And He did this by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to be "born of woman, born under the law." Christ was fully human, and He was born as a Jew, subject to the law. He obeyed the law perfectly, and then, despite the fact that

He had no sin, He took the punishment we deserve. Now all who put their trust in Jesus receive “adoption as sons.”

Today’s passage reminds us that we are helpless apart from God’s grace. Even our best attempts to keep God’s law cannot save us. It took God sending His Son, in the flesh, to rescue sinners like us. Our obedience is the fruit of God’s grace, not the cause of it.

Simple Summary

The law was God’s good gift to His people, Israel. It revealed what He was like and how His people ought to live. However, the law could not solve Israel’s sin problem. In fact, the law said that those who disobeyed would be cursed, or punished. Thankfully, God did what the law could not do: He provided redemption (freedom from the power and penalty of sin) by sending His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus was fully human, and He obeyed the law perfectly in our place. He then died on the cross to take the punishment our sins deserve. Now, because of what Jesus has done, all who trust in Him are forgiven of their sins and are adopted into God’s family.

Discuss

What are you tempted to rely on in order to earn God’s favor—spiritual disciplines, gifts, abilities, good works, etc.? Does this mean we should not be diligent to obey God? Explain your answer.

For Kids: Will God forgive our sins if we try hard to obey His commands? Then how can we have our sins forgiven? (*Explain the difference between relying on Jesus and relying on ourselves for salvation.*)

Pray

Thank Jesus for rescuing us from sin's power and penalty.

For Further Reading

Read Romans 3:9–26 to learn more about why we must look to Christ, rather than the law, for salvation.

**See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 6–10 on pp. 72–73.*



Key Takeaway

The Holy Spirit shows us the identity and greatness of Jesus.

TODAY'S READING

Luke **1:39–45**

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

Brief Reflection

The Holy Spirit’s ministry has been compared to a spotlight. He puts the focus not primarily on Himself but on Jesus Christ. This is precisely what the Spirit did through John—who was filled with the Spirit from his mother’s womb (Luke 1:15)—and through Elizabeth in today’s passage.

When Mary greeted Elizabeth, the Spirit caused John to leap for joy inside his mother’s womb! The Spirit also filled Elizabeth on this occasion, prompting her to exclaim (loudly) about how blessed

Mary was. The Spirit was testifying to the identity and greatness of the child inside Mary.

If we are not familiar with Israel's worship in the Old Testament, then it's easy to miss just how stunning today's passage is. From their earliest days, Israelite children would have known that their worship and love belonged exclusively to the Lord, the one true God (Exodus 20:3–6; Deuteronomy 6:4). And yet, Elizabeth referred to Mary as the “mother of my Lord.” Let that sink in: Elizabeth, prompted by the Spirit, refers to her cousin's unborn child as her *Lord*! The child inside Mary's womb was fully human, but He was also fully divine. The God of Israel, the Lord of creation, had (in the person of His Son) come in the flesh. No wonder Elizabeth shouted and the baby leapt!

Simple Summary

When Mary greeted Elizabeth, the Holy Spirit caused Elizabeth's baby, John, to leap for joy. The Spirit then led Elizabeth to shout because of the greatness of Mary's baby, a baby Elizabeth refers to as her *Lord*! Mary's baby is unlike any other baby, for though He is fully human like us, He is also fully God. The Holy Spirit helps us see Jesus for who He really is.

Discuss

How does the Holy Spirit bear witness to Jesus today? What's the danger of separating the Spirit's testimony from the Word of God?

For Kids: How is Jesus different than any other baby that has been born? (*Explain that Jesus is God in the flesh.*)

Pray

Ask God to continue to open your eyes to the beauty and greatness of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. Pray that He would help you proclaim this to others as well.

For Further Reading

Read about the Spirit's ministry of testifying to Jesus in John 15:26–16:15.

** See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 6–10 on pp. 72–73.*



Key Takeaway

Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh, the Son of God through whom the world was created.

TODAY'S READING

John 1:1–3, 14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Brief Reflection

Yesterday we considered the extraordinary fact that Jesus was referred to as Lord while in His mother's womb (Luke 1:43). The idea that Jesus was fully divine has never been easy for the world to accept, yet it's this truth that makes Christmas Christmas. God has come, in the person of His Son, to save His people. Perhaps nowhere is Christ's deity more clearly stated than in today's reading.

John speaks of "the Word," the One who was in the beginning "with God." And lest we miss John's point, he also says the Word "*was* God" (emphasis added). We know the Word is a reference to Jesus because later in the passage we're told that this same Word "became flesh and dwelt among us." He was fully man and fully God.

How humbling to think that the Son of God, the One who was with the Father from all eternity, the One through whom all things were made, stooped to enter our mess. He felt our sorrows and,

though He had no sin of His own (Hebrews 4:15), suffered on our behalf. This was God, in the flesh, giving Himself for us. This is what we celebrate during the Advent season. How fitting, then, that John, who walked around with Jesus for the better part of three years, would say, “. . . we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Simple Summary

The baby born in Bethlehem two thousand years ago was no ordinary child. He was fully human, just like us, and fully God. John calls Jesus the “Word,” the One through whom God spoke the world into existence. And this Word “became flesh.” That’s what Christmas is about—God coming to dwell with us and give His life for us. We should continually give thanks that God is so gracious.

Discuss

What do you think most people mean when they talk about the “wonder” of Christmas? How might today’s passage help us focus our “wonder” rightly?

For Kids: Today’s reading says that “the Word” was with God in the beginning and the Word was God. Who is the Word? (*Read John 1:14 again as a reminder that the Word “became flesh.”*)

Pray

Thank God for His grace and mercy in sending His own Son for your salvation.

For Further Reading

Read more about the One who was fully God and yet gave Himself for our sins in Colossians 1:15–20.

**See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 11–15 on pp. 72–73.*

The Humble and the Hungry



Key Takeaway

God's mercy reaches those who are ignored or despised by the world.

TODAY'S READING

Luke 1:46-55

And Mary said,

*"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call
me blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of
their hearts;
he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever."*

Brief Reflection

Our culture is enamored with the wealthy and the powerful. Athletes, actors, politicians, and successful CEOs—these people just seem to matter more. Even as Christians, we are drawn to worldly standards of power and influence.

In today's passage Mary celebrated the fact that God was turning the world's standards and expectations upside-down. He was keeping His promises, but He was doing it in a surprising way. Instead of the proud, it was the humble who were receiving His favor; instead of the rich, the hungry were being filled. Those who were insignificant in the world's eyes would receive God's mercy and steadfast love. This is still God's pattern today:

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1 Corinthians 1:26–29)

God's chief aim is to put his own glory on display, and one of the ways He does this is by undermining the world's wisdom. The Messiah comes through an unknown virgin from Nazareth. Eternal riches are promised to those who admit they are spiritually bankrupt. The King of the universe saves His people by dying on a cross.

Simple Summary

Mary praised God for His mercy and His faithfulness. She was overcome with joy at the idea that God would use her to fulfill His promises of salvation. Rather than showing favor to the rich and the proud, God was showing His grace to the humble and the poor. We're reminded that God's ways are very different from ours. He reaches out to those who are forgotten and rejected by the world.

Discuss

In what areas are you tempted to value the world's wisdom instead of God's wisdom? List some specific examples.

For Kids: Does God need people who are strong or rich or smart to carry out His plans? Why not?

Pray

Thank God that His mercy extends to the poor and the despised, and even to you. Ask Him to give you this kind of compassion for others.

For Further Reading

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18–31 to learn more about how the message of the cross undermines the world's wisdom.

** See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 11–15 on pp. 72–73.*



Key Takeaway

God's greatness should cause us to stand in awe of Him.

TODAY'S READING

Luke
1:57-66

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.

Brief Reflection

God has His own way of letting us know that He is up to something big. The angel had already told Zechariah and Elizabeth that their child would be unique, and now their friends and family were

beginning to suspect the same thing.

Even though Zechariah couldn't speak for a time, he was able to write out the name of his son on a tablet. Much to the crowd's surprise, Zechariah and Elizabeth chose the same name, despite the fact that it was not a family name. But this was no coincidence. John, you may remember, was the name given by the angel (Luke 1:13). If the crowd wasn't paying attention yet, then they certainly took notice when God opened Zechariah's mouth and the formerly mute priest began to bless God. The people feared, and we can understand why.

The unusual circumstances surrounding John's birth let us know that God was at work. But we can't lose sight of the bigger picture. The main point was never John the Baptist's coming, but rather the *Lord's* coming. John was simply preparing the way, and He knew it. This prophet who stormed onto the scene and drew large crowds and devoted followers would soon say of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Simple Summary

Elizabeth gave birth to a son, just as the angel had promised. However, when Elizabeth named the child John, everyone was surprised. They thought the child would be named after his father, Zechariah, but Zechariah agreed with Elizabeth—his name would be John. God had earlier taken away Zechariah's ability to speak, but now He opened Zechariah's mouth and Zechariah blessed God. Fear came upon those who saw and heard about these things, for they wondered what God might be planning for this child.

Discuss

God is not honored when we fear Him based on the belief that His anger is arbitrary or unjust. However, the Bible does say we should

fear God (Proverbs 1:7; 1 Peter 1:17). What does it mean to fear God rightly, and how should this fear affect the way we respond to God?

For Kids: What does it mean to respect God? Why should we respect God? (*Remind your children that God is our Creator and that He is in charge. Highlight His attributes—His power, authority, love, goodness, etc.*)

Pray

Ask God to help you serve Him with the kind of fear that honors Him.

For Further Reading

Read the call for the whole earth to fear the Lord in Psalm 47.

** See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 11–15 on pp. 72–73.*



Key Takeaway

God's promises are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit bears witness to this truth.

TODAY'S READING

Luke 1:67-80

And his [John's] father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

*“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
that we should be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us;
to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the*

*shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”*

*And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was
in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to
Israel.*

Brief Reflection

Consider the role the Holy Spirit has already played in this story. First, the angel told Zechariah that his son, John, would be filled with the Spirit. Second, Mary was told that the Holy Spirit would cause her to give birth to Jesus. Third, when Mary greeted Elizabeth, the Spirit filled Elizabeth and prompted her to pronounce a blessing on Mary. God is directing the events of the Christmas story, and all of history, through the powerful work of His Spirit.

As a result of the Spirit's filling in today's passage, Zechariah prophesied about Jesus. More specifically, Zechariah told of how God was fulfilling His saving promises to His people through Jesus. The expectations of the Old Testament—the messages of the prophets (Isaiah 53, etc.), the covenant with David (2 Samuel 7:12–14), and the oath God swore to Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3)—were all being met. This is the good news John was sent to preach.

We do not have the same role as John the Baptist, but we have been commanded to tell others the good news of Jesus Christ. And we too can rely on the Spirit as we proclaim the truths of the gospel. Because He is gracious, God is still drawing sinners to Himself through His Son by the power of His Spirit.

Simple Summary

Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he blessed God for His faithfulness and His salvation. God's promises to David and Abraham were being fulfilled in the coming of Christ. God was sending His people a Savior, and Zechariah's son, John, would point people to Him.

Discuss

How does God's faithfulness in this passage help you rely more fully on His promises? List some promises in the Bible that bring you security and hope.

For Kids: What is one promise God gives us in His Word? (*Example: God will never forsake His people according to Hebrews 13:5.*)

Pray

Thank God for His faithfulness and for the hope that we have because of His promises.

For Further Reading

Read about Peter's proclamation of Christ as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies following the Spirit's coming at Pentecost in Acts 2.

** See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 11–15 on pp. 72–73.*



Key Takeaway

John the Baptist was the promised prophet who announced the Lord's coming.

TODAY'S READING

Matthew 3:1–6

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,

*"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight.'"*

Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Brief Reflection

John the Baptist was a striking figure. Before his public ministry, he spent most of his time in the wilderness. We learn from Matthew's Gospel that John's diet consisted of locusts and wild honey and that he wore a garment of camel's hair. Who ever heard of a prophet with a wardrobe like that?

Actually, the description of John's clothing sounds very similar to another great prophet of Israel—Elijah (2 Kings 1:8). This

similarity was no coincidence, for the angel had told Elizabeth that her son would go before the Lord “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17). Jesus later confirmed this same connection between Elijah and John (Matthew 11:14), a connection that had been prophesied centuries earlier:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. (Malachi 4:5)

John prepared the way for Jesus as he proclaimed, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This message of repentance prepared Israel for the coming of the King. Now, as we reflect on the King’s first coming during Advent, we too ought to respond with repentance as we gladly anticipate His second coming.

Simple Summary

Hundreds of years before Christ’s coming, the prophet Isaiah said there would be a voice in the wilderness who would prepare the way for the Lord. (A prophet is someone who speaks and writes the words given to him by God.) That voice was John the Baptist, the prophet who prepared Israel to meet King Jesus by calling them to repent, or turn from their sins. Like the Old Testament prophet Elijah, John’s ministry was filled with the Lord’s power.

Discuss

As believers, what does it mean to be prepared for Christ’s second coming?

For Kids: When is the last time you felt sorry about something you thought or said or did? What did you do when you felt this way?

(Remember, we want our children to sense the Lord's conviction over their sins. Encourage your children to confess their sins to the Lord instead of trying to hide them.)

Pray

Ask God to help you continually turn from your sins and trust in His grace and power.

For Further Reading

Read more in Isaiah 40:1–8 about the background to John the Baptist's ministry of preparing the way of the Lord.

** See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 11–15 on pp. 72–73.*



Key Takeaway

God's plan to bless all the peoples of the earth through Abraham was fulfilled in Jesus.

TODAY'S READING

Genesis 12:1-3

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Brief Reflection

Abraham has been mentioned twice in Luke's account of Christ's birth, as both Mary and Zechariah praised God for keeping His word to this well-known patriarch of the Old Testament (Luke 1:54-55, 73). This should lead us to ask the question, *What exactly did God promise to Abraham?*

In today's passage we read about God's original promise to Abraham (originally Abram), a promise that set the stage for God's saving plan to unfold throughout Scripture. God promised to make Abraham into a great nation. We know that great nation as Israel, God's treasured possession among all the peoples of the earth. Only Israel would receive God's law and His covenant blessings. However, God's blessings were never intended to stop with Israel.

The promise to Abraham was that, through him, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Israel was supposed to be a pipeline of

God's blessings, not a dam. Through Israel would come the Messiah, Jesus, and through Jesus would come salvation for all the peoples of the earth. Today, as the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed and believed across the world, people are still coming to share in the blessing of Abraham. It's the same blessing we receive when we put our trust in Christ. How grateful we should be that God keeps His promises!

Simple Summary

God promised Abraham that he would make him a great nation, and that great nation was Israel. God also promised Abraham that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. This worldwide blessing came through Jesus, who was from Abraham's family. Jesus fulfills God's promise to Abraham because He is the Savior of all the peoples on the earth.

Discuss

Does God's promise of worldwide blessing mean that everyone will be saved? Why not?

For Kids: God said he would use Abraham to bless all the peoples of the earth. How did He do that? (*Parents, remind your children that Jesus is from Abraham's family.*)

Pray

Thank God that He has provided a Savior for all the peoples of the earth. Ask Him to use you to make this good news known.

For Further Reading

To learn more about how we come to share in God's promise to Abraham, read Romans 4.

** See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 16–20 on pp. 72–74.*



Key Takeaway

Isaiah prophesied that a son of David would bring salvation and that His kingdom would be everlasting.

TODAY'S READING

Isaiah 9:6-7

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

Brief Reflection

Largely unnoticed by the world, there, in Bethlehem, lay God's plan to rescue His sinful people. As unexpected as this plan sounds, it's actually one that God foretold centuries earlier. In spite of His people's rebellion, God had determined to pour out His grace on them.

Isaiah spoke of a "child" to be born, a "son" given to rescue God's people. This child would surpass all others who had come before Him, for He would be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Such titles are only appropriate

for God's fully divine Son. If you've been following the Christmas story, then it should come as no surprise that this promised One, this Messiah, was Jesus.

Isaiah also tells us that this promised child would be a son from David's royal line and that His kingdom would have no end. In contrast to the many wicked rulers in Israel's history, this King would be known for His righteousness and justice. He would be the Savior God's people did not deserve but so desperately needed.

Simple Summary

Even though God's people, Israel, had rebelled against Him, God planned to rescue them by sending a child who would become an everlasting King. This child would one day rule God's people with righteousness and justice. He would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. This King from David's line would provide salvation for Israel and for the world.

Discuss

What is the danger of looking to earthly rulers for our hope and protection? How is Christ's rule different from these other rulers?

For Kids: What makes Jesus such a great King? (*Remind children that King Jesus is fully God and that He is powerful, righteous, merciful, just, etc.*)

Pray

Ask God to help you submit to Christ's rule in all areas of your life.

For Further Reading

Read more about Isaiah's prophecy of the coming Messiah in Isaiah 11:1–10.

**See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 16–20 on pp. 72–74.*



Key Takeaway

God orchestrated events so that the birth of Christ would take place in Bethlehem in fulfillment of Scripture.

TODAY'S READING

Luke **2:1–7**

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 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, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Brief Reflection

God is always at work in the world, even when we don't realize it. In today's passage, Joseph and Mary are forced to comply with a decree from Caesar. The "entire world" was being taxed (which was the primary purpose of a "registration"), and this required the couple to return to Joseph's hometown of Bethlehem.

At first glance, Caesar's decree may sound completely unrelated to God's redemptive purposes. However, Joseph and Mary's trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem was anything but random—it was by

divine design. Centuries earlier, the Old Testament prophet Micah had declared,

But you, O *Bethlehem* Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old,
from ancient days. (Micah 5:2, emphasis added)

Micah's prediction of a ruler from Bethlehem was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. And God used the decree of Caesar, a pagan, unbelieving ruler, to carry out His plan. It's no coincidence that Mary's time to give birth came while she was in Bethlehem, nor is it a coincidence that Jesus was born in the city of David. Unbeknownst to most of the world, the promised King from David's line (2 Samuel 7:12–13; Matthew 1:1), the Lord of heaven and earth, was wrapped in swaddling cloths lying in a feeding trough.

Simple Summary

God had promised long ago through a prophet named Micah that a ruler would come from Bethlehem. In order to carry out this plan, God used an order from Caesar that required people to return to their hometown. Since Bethlehem was Joseph's hometown, he and Mary went there, and it was in Bethlehem that Mary gave birth to Jesus. This was the most important birth in the history of the world, but it wouldn't have looked that way to those who saw it. Jesus was lying where the animals ate—in a manger—because there was no room for him in the inn.

Discuss

Many circumstances and events are completely out of our control. How does today's passage help you trust God's providence and His promises of redemption in light of this reality?

For Kids: How do we know that God is in control of all things if we can't see Him? (*We trust the promises of His Word.*)

Pray

Ask God to strengthen your faith in His promises and in His providence when you are anxious or when you face opposition for your faith.

For Further Reading

Read more in Matthew 2:1–23 about the promises fulfilled in the birth of Jesus.

** See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 16–20 on pp. 72–74.*



Key Takeaway

Jesus was despised, rejected, and crucified for our sins so that we might have peace with God.

TODAY'S READING

Isaiah 53:1–6

*Who has believed what he has heard from us?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

*Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

Brief Reflection

This time of year holds an attraction for most people, including unbelievers. The sounds, sights, and smells of Christmas naturally attract us. That's not a bad thing, in and of itself, but we should not be deceived into thinking that Christ's birth, nor the years that followed, looked like a Christmas postcard.

Today's reading predicted that the Messiah, whom we know as Jesus, would not attract people based on His outward appearance. He had "no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him." In other words, Jesus was not the kind of Messiah most people were expecting. Instead of being celebrated, He was "despised and rejected by men." But, praise God, even Christ's rejection was part of God's saving plan, for "it was the will of the Lord to crush Him" (Isaiah 53:10).

Christ was not punished for His own sin, since He had none, but rather He was "crushed for *our* iniquities" (emphasis added). Jesus took our punishment on the cross in order to bring us peace with God. The One who, outwardly speaking, looked so unimpressive to the world is beautiful and precious to the eyes of faith. This Messiah was a "man of sorrows," but to believers He brings indescribable and unending joy.

Simple Summary

Jesus did not attract people based on what He looked like. Most people did not believe He was the Savior, and some even hated Him enough to crucify Him. However, Jesus' death on the cross was the payment for *our* sins. This Savior who was hated by men brings forgiveness and salvation to those who trust in Him.

Discuss

Jesus was not the kind of Messiah people were expecting. How is this still true today? What is it about the gospel message that is so difficult for people to accept?

For Kids: Why didn't God's people recognize Jesus as the Savior sent from God? *(Many people were expecting a Savior who looked powerful enough to defeat Israel's enemies.)*

Pray

Thank Christ for being willing to be despised, rejected, and crucified so that we might be forgiven of our sins and have peace with God.

For Further Reading

Read about Christ's crucifixion, which He endured on our behalf, in Matthew 27:1–54.

** See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 16–20 on pp. 72–74.*



Key Takeaway

God opens our eyes to see Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God.

TODAY'S READING

Matthew 16:13–17

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”

Brief Reflection

The question Jesus asked His disciples in today’s reading—“But who do you say that I am?”—is the same question that confronts us at Christmas. It’s not the question most people think about this time of year, and yet it determines the eternal destiny of everyone on earth. *Who was this child born to Mary and Joseph?* Each of us must give an answer.

Jesus’ disciples report hearing several wrong answers to this question. Jesus was thought to be John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets. Those answers are understandable, since Jesus was a prophet, but they are not sufficient. As Peter recognized, Jesus was (and is) “the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Unless we see this, that Jesus is the Christ (God's Spirit-Anointed Deliverer) and the fully divine Son of God, then we will miss the point of Christmas. Worse yet, we will miss the salvation God freely offers us.

For those who have identified Jesus rightly, today's reading also reminds us we have no reason for pride or boasting. We did not believe the gospel based on our own wisdom or insight. As Jesus reminded Peter, such truths are graciously revealed by "my Father who is in heaven." The Father opens our eyes to see the true identity of this child who was born in Bethlehem. It is only by sovereign grace that we are saved.

Simple Summary

When Jesus asked His disciples who people thought He was, the disciples said John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Only Peter gave the right answer—Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." However, Peter did not get this answer on his own or from another person. It was God the Father who opened Peter's heart to see Jesus rightly. God does this for us too, opening our eyes to see that Jesus is His Son and the Savior we need.

Discuss

If you asked the question "Who is Jesus?" to unbelievers you know, what answers would you expect? What truth in today's reading should cause us to depend on God as we share our faith and explain the truth of who Jesus is?

For Kids: Who is Jesus? (*Among the various answers children may give, remind them that Jesus is the Savior and the Son of God.*)

Pray

Thank God for opening your eyes to the truth of the gospel. Ask Him to do the same for unbelieving family members, friends, and co-workers.

For Further Reading

Read Acts 9:1–19 to see how God opened the eyes of Paul, a former persecutor of the church, to see Jesus rightly.

** See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 16–20 on pp. 72–74.*



Key Takeaway

Christmas is ultimately the story of God's salvation in Jesus Christ, and each of us must respond.

TODAY'S READING

**John
3:16–18**

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Brief Reflection

As miraculous and fascinating as the birth of Christ is, we cannot forget that it is part of a much larger story, a story that stretches from Genesis to Revelation. It's the story of a God who created us (and all things) for His own glory. And, in light of our sin, it's the story of a God who graciously enters our broken world in order to redeem those who have sinned against Him.

We were made to live under God's loving and just rule. However, when the first man, Adam, rebelled against God's command, his fellowship with God was broken. From that point on, Adam's descendants—the entire human race—were born dead in sin. Our sinful condition can be seen in our enslavement to sinful desires, thoughts, words, and actions. Tragically, our sin separates us from God, leading ultimately to God's just, eternal punishment.

Our terrible predicament is why today's passage is such good

news. Although we have rebelled against God, He has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from our sins and to give us eternal life. After being born in Bethlehem, Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to God, the life that we have failed to live. Then Jesus died on the cross, bearing in His body God's punishment, the punishment we deserve. But Jesus didn't stay dead.

God raised Jesus from the dead, demonstrating to the world that the cross was a sufficient sacrifice for sins. Now, all who turn from their sin and trust in Jesus will be reconciled to God forever. Trusting in Jesus involves surrendering to His lordship and authority, which is what we were created for in the first place. But we can't do any of this on our own; it's all by God's grace and through the power of His Spirit.

What about you . . . have you responded to this good news by trusting in Jesus?

Simple Summary

Christmas is part of a larger story, the story of God's salvation in Jesus Christ. We all need this salvation because we are all born in sin, and we have all rebelled against God. The gospel, or good news, is that God sent His Son, Jesus, to live a perfect life, to die for our sins on the cross, and then to rise from the dead. All who trust in Christ receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. Trusting in Christ for salvation also means that we follow Him as our Lord and King; we agree to obey His commands. God saves us, not because of our good works, but because of His grace and love.

Discuss

How would you respond to an unbeliever who asks, "Why should I care about the Christmas story?"

For Kids: What is the gospel, or good news, of Jesus Christ? (*Review the gospel with your kids, including Christ's perfect life, His death on the cross for our sins, and His resurrection from the dead.*)

Pray

Ask God to help you rely fully on Christ's life, death, and resurrection for your forgiveness and for the hope of eternal life.

For Further Reading

Read more about God's saving grace in Ephesians 2:1–10.

** See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 21–25 on pp. 72–74.*



Key Takeaway

The child born to Joseph and Mary was the Savior, Messiah, and Lord.

TODAY'S READING

Luke 2:8–21

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 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. 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. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

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

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.” And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and

the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Brief Reflection

It must have been quite a spectacle when an army of angels showed up unannounced that night in the middle of a field. God certainly got the shepherds' attention, for they were stunned in the presence of His glory. They had to be reassured by the angels not to fear. The most amazing part of this night, though, was not what was seen but rather what was heard. The angels called this newborn in Bethlehem "a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Unfortunately, those titles—Savior, Christ, and Lord—can become so familiar to us that we fail to pause and consider their significance.

As *Savior*, Jesus was the One who would rescue His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). This would ultimately be accomplished through His life, death, and resurrection. *Christ*, on the other hand, is a term often used for the long-expected Messiah. It means "anointed one," for Jesus was the Spirit-Anointed Deliverer of God's people.

Finally, the title *Lord* signifies Jesus' sovereign authority over everyone and everything. This is the same title used for the God of Israel in the Old Testament, another indication that Jesus is fully divine. The angels were right, then, and so are we, to respond to this child by giving glory to God.

Simple Summary

An army of angels announced the good news to a group of lowly shepherds—Jesus, the Savior, had been born. The angels called this newborn child the “Savior” because Jesus would save His people from their sins. The angels also called Jesus “Christ the Lord.” “Christ” means that Jesus is the One God chose to deliver His people; “Lord” means that He is in charge of everyone and everything. When God's glory shone around these shepherds, they were afraid. But the angels told them not to fear and to make this good news known. The shepherds obeyed, and they returned giving praise to God.

Discuss

Jesus has great affection for His people, but that doesn't mean we should treat Him casually or lightly. How does today's passage help us maintain an exalted view of Jesus?

For Kids: Why do you think the birth of Jesus caused the angels to praise God? (*Point out that Jesus saves us from our sins, that He is God's chosen Deliverer, and that He is Lord over everyone and everything.*)

Pray

Ask God to give you courage to share with unbelievers the good news about who Jesus is.

For Further Reading

Read Revelation 5 to get a glimpse of the worship that Jesus Christ is due.

**See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 21–25 on pp. 72–74.*

Good News is Meant to Be Spread



Key Takeaway

Jesus commanded His followers to make disciples, and this involves sharing the gospel with unbelievers.

TODAY'S READING

Matthew 28:18–20

And Jesus came and said to them [His disciples], “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Brief Reflection

In yesterday’s reading the angels announced to the shepherds that the child born in Bethlehem was the Savior, “Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). After seeing this child with their own eyes, the shepherds made known what they had heard. Good news, both then and now, is meant to be spread.

Today we know much more than the shepherds did about the salvation God has provided in Christ. The New Testament unpacks the gospel and its implications for us. We know, for instance, that all who trust in Christ receive the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life. How, then, can we not make this good news known?

In today’s reading we learn that spreading the good news about Jesus is something we’re commanded to do. Jesus tells His disciples—and, by extension, His church in all ages—to “make disciples of all nations.” The first step in making disciples is to make the gospel

known. Then, according to Jesus, we baptize those who trust in Him and teach them His commands. But this is not something we do in our own strength. The One who has given us this command has “all authority in heaven and on earth,” and He, Jesus, has promised to be with us “to the end of the age.” So we share this good news with joy and with confidence in the power of the Risen Lord.

Simple Summary

Followers of Christ have good news to share with the world. We not only know about Christ's birth, like the shepherds, but we also know about Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Jesus has commanded us to share this good news as we make disciples of all nations. And we can have confidence as we carry out Christ's mission because He has all authority and He has promised to be with us.

Discuss

In your own words, what does it mean to make disciples? What are some practical ways this might take place in your own life?

For Kids: Why is it so important that we tell others about Jesus? *(Point out that we were created to know and love God, that we are all sinners, and that eternity is at stake in our response to Jesus.)*

Pray

Ask God to strengthen your faith so that you might share the gospel boldly with those around you. Pray that God would open their hearts to the truth of who Jesus is.

** See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 21–25 on pp. 72–74.*



Key Takeaway

God's greatest revelation to us comes through His Son, Jesus Christ.

TODAY'S READING

Hebrews 1:1–4

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Brief Reflection

God has a long track-record of communicating with His people. He spoke through the prophets throughout the Old Testament, which gave Israel the distinct privilege of hearing from God. But these earlier revelations, while true and authoritative, were not God's final and climactic Word.

It is in these "last days," today's reading tells us, that God has spoken to us "by his Son." The Son, Jesus Christ, is "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature." He is God's very "Word" made flesh (John 1:1–3, 14). He died for our sins, rose again, and is now seated at "the right hand of the Majesty on high."

Though few realized it at the time, God was beginning to speak His final and most glorious Word when He sent His Son. The significance of this Word is explained and unpacked in the New Testament. Therefore, if we want to be saved and grow in our knowledge of God, we need look no further than Scripture's testimony to Christ, the Son. He is God's final Word.

Simple Summary

God spoke to His people through the prophets of the Old Testament, but now He has spoken to us in a much greater way. He has spoken to us by His Son, Jesus Christ. If we want to know what God is like, then we should listen to what the Bible teaches about Jesus.

Discuss

Explain why the following statement is not true: "The fact that Jesus is God's greatest revelation means that the Old Testament is no longer important."

For Kids: How can we hear God speak today? (*Point out that God speaks through Scripture, which bears witness to Jesus Christ.*)

Pray

Thank God for revealing Himself to us in His Son rather than leaving us in the darkness of sin.

For Further Reading

Hear the risen Lord Jesus talk about how the Old Testament bears witness to Him in Luke 24:1–27.

** See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 21–25 on pp. 72–74.*

***Key Takeaway***

The Son of God was willing to become poor so that we might become eternally rich.

**TODAY'S
READING**

**2 Corinthians
8:9**

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became
poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*

Brief Reflection

Some gifts cannot be fully appreciated until we understand what was involved in giving them. That's certainly true when it comes to the gift God has given us in His Son. If we don't consider what it took for the Son of God to be born as a man and to come and live among us, then we will miss the depths of God's grace and love.

The Son of God did not cease to be fully God when He became man—that would be impossible—but He did, for a time, give up some of His privileges. He was rich, but as today's reading puts it, He became poor for our sake. The One whom the angels worshipped became the object of man's hatred and rejection. The One who shared in the Father's glory before the creation of the world was tired, thirsty, and weighed down with sorrows. He was even willing to be crucified for sinners like us.

We will never fully be able to wrap our minds around the incarnation, but the more we reflect on it, the more we should be in awe. The God who created all things and is worthy of all praise and

worship has given His Son so that we might be reconciled to Him. Our riches were made possible because of Christ's poverty. Now, at Christmas, the apostle Paul's response in 2 Corinthians 9:15 seems especially fitting: "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!"

Simple Summary

Even though Jesus was the Son of God, He was willing to come and live among us. He became man, and He was even willing to be crucified. And He did all this so that we might be saved. Christ was rich, but He became poor so that those who trust in Him might have eternal life.

Discuss

Given that Christ did not give up His deity, what *did* He give up when He came, in the flesh, to save us?

For Kids: How does Christ's coming show us God's love?

Pray

Praise God the Father that He was willing to send His Son for your salvation. Praise the Son that He was willing to become poor so that you might be rich. Praise the Spirit for opening your heart to these glorious realities.

For Further Reading

Read more about Christ's humility in His incarnation in Philippians 2:1–11.

** See the suggested Memory Verse and Practical Response for December 21–25 on pp. 72–74.*

MEMORY VERSES

A short memory verse is given for each set of five days in this guide. Read this verse aloud for the five days listed and encourage those participating to memorize it. (*Ex: Read and memorize Matthew 1:21b for Days 1–5.*)

DAYS 1–5

**Matthew
1:21b**

“... you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

DAYS 6–10

**Luke
1:37**

“For nothing will be impossible with God.”

DAYS 11–15

**John
1:14a**

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory...”

DAYS 16–20

**Isaiah
53:5a**

*“But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities...”*

DAYS 21–25

**Luke
2:11**

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Below we've suggested some practical ways for families and individuals to respond to the good news of Christ's coming. A new suggestion is given for each set of five days in this guide. (*Ex: Pray for unreached people groups on Days 1–5.*)

DAYS 1–5: Pray for the Unreached

Take time this week to pray for those around the world who are unreached with the gospel. Unreached peoples and places are those among whom Christ is largely unknown and the church is relatively insufficient to make Christ known in its broader population without outside help. Pray for believers to be sent to proclaim the gospel where it is not now known. To find out more about unreached peoples and places, visit the following websites:

peoplegroups.org | joshuaproject.net | operationworld.org

DAYS 6–10: Reach Out to a Neighbor

Reach out to someone who lives close to you this week. For example, you might invite them to dinner or take cookies to them. Use this interaction as an opportunity to talk about why you are grateful for Christ's coming at Christmas. You might also ask them if there is any way you can pray for them.

DAYS 11–15: Meet a Need

As a family, purchase a gift for a family, an individual, or a child in your community who cannot afford a gift at Christmas. Alternately, you might serve for a day at a local Christian ministry that cares for the homeless and/or underprivileged in your community.

DAYS 16–20: Pray for the Persecuted

In addition to praying for the unreached, we should also remember to pray for brothers and sisters in Christ who are facing opposition for their faith. Pray that God would sustain their faith and empower their witness to Christ. For more on the persecution of Christians across the world, visit opendoorsusa.org.

DAYS 21–25: Encourage a Missionary

Write a note of encouragement and send a care package to a missionary sent out by your church. You may consider reaching out to them beforehand to ask for any specific prayer needs or items they would like to receive in their care package. Let them know you are praying for their ministry and for their family. Use this opportunity to talk as a family about your role in spreading the gospel to the nations.

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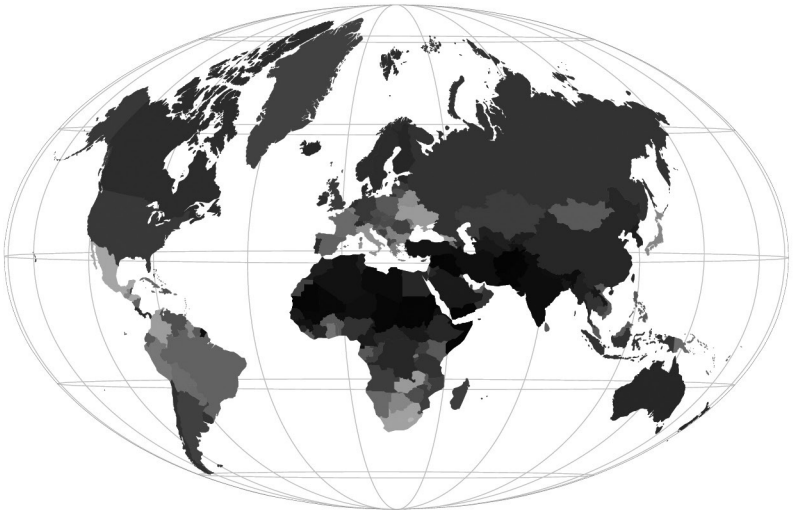
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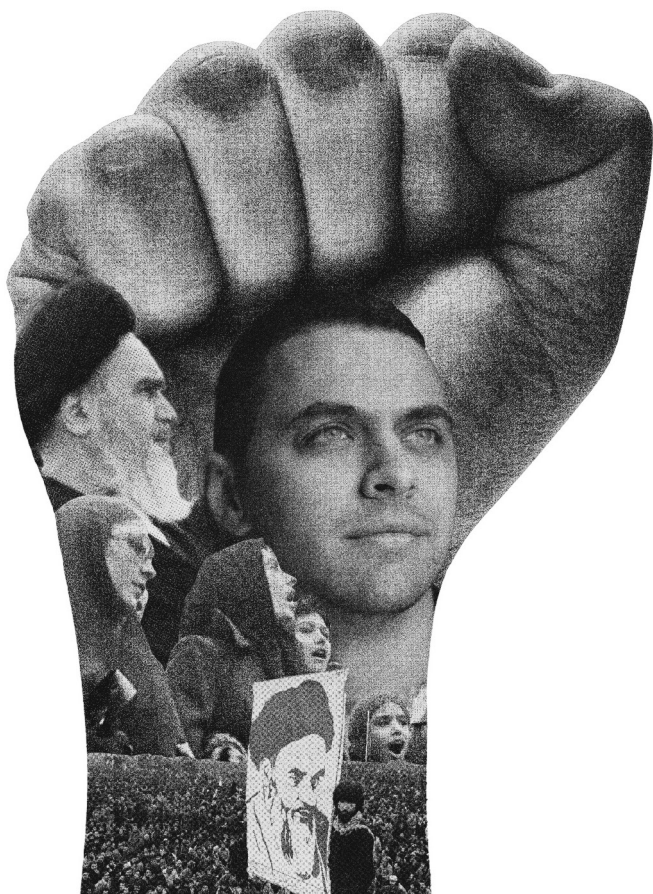
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Radical serves the church by equipping Christians to follow Jesus and to make him known in their neighborhoods and among all nations. In places where the gospel is already accessible, we work to awaken and mobilize the church. In areas where access is limited, we work to advance the gospel and see churches planted.

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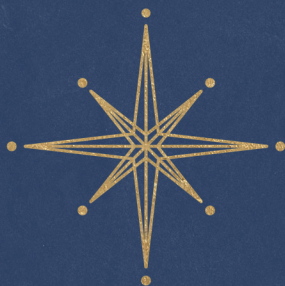


ABOUT DAVID PLATT

David Platt serves as a pastor in metro Washington, DC. He is the founder of Radical.

David received his PhD from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and is the author of *Don't Hold Back*, *Radical*, *Follow Me*, *Counter Culture*, *Something Needs to Change*, and *Before You Vote*, as well as multiple volumes of the *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* series.

Along with his wife and children, he lives in the Washington, DC, metro area.



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