THE BASICS OF CHRISTMAS



2026 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

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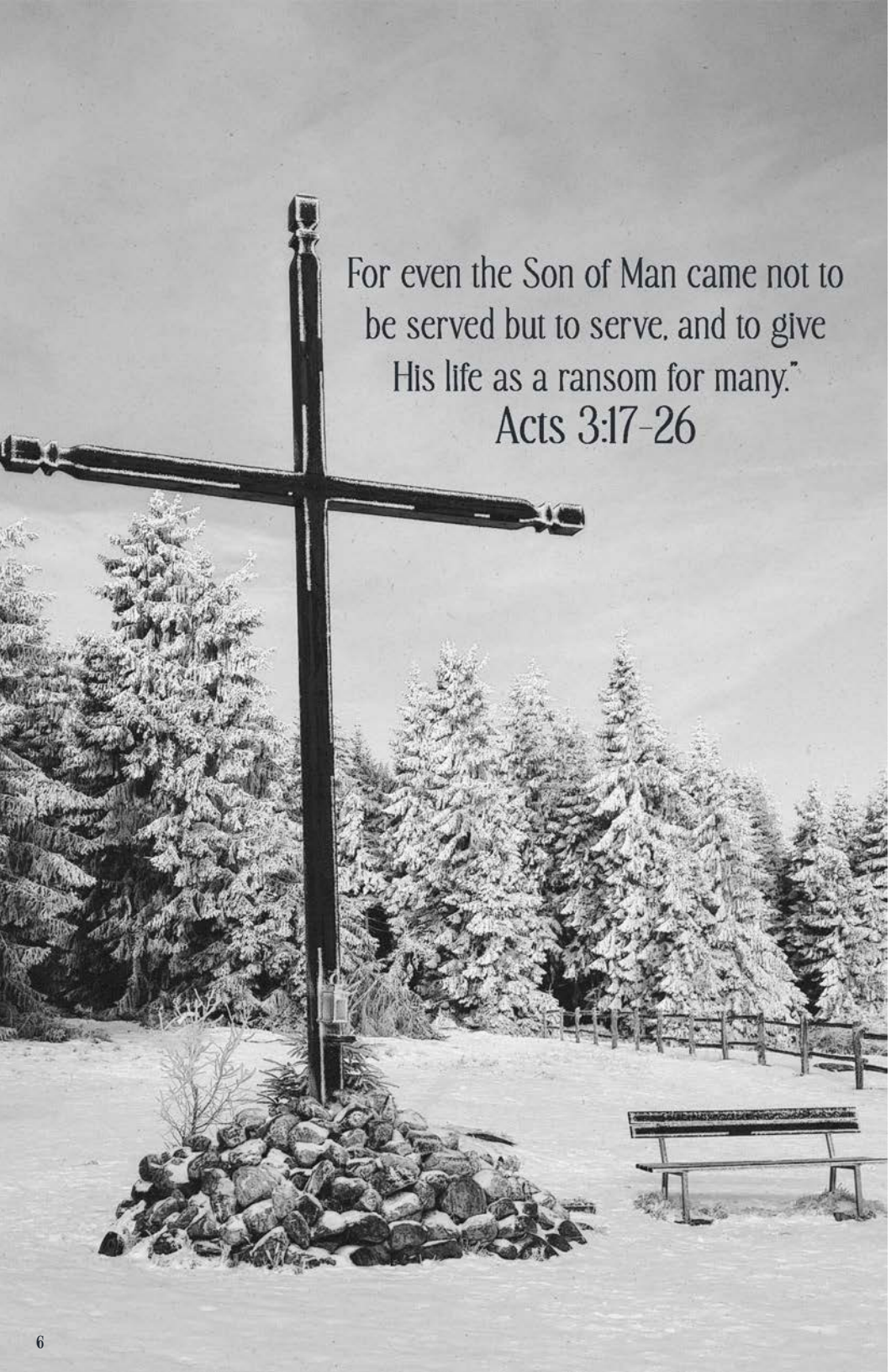
What are the basics of Christmas? What are the most important aspects of The Most Wonderful Time of the Year? Each year, we repeat the Christmas busyness cycle. We spend so much time and money-making memories and creating a picture-perfect experience for everyone to see. Our living rooms turn from decoration to destruction as wrapping paper covers the floor, and the stress of cleanup and New Year's prep sets in. If we aren't careful, we will miss the foundation and blessing of Advent.

Have we lost the basics of Christmas? Have we forgotten or ignored the details of the manger story? Have we put aside worship for the pursuit of superficial pleasures? I have good news...you have time today to enjoy what Christmas is all about.

What comes to your mind when you think of the night when our Savior was born? Do you picture a manger with humans and animals together? Do you see shepherds and royalty worshipping a baby? Do you hear a donkey braying or a cow's cadence? Come join me on this journey this month. On our journey, we will look at the night of the first Christmas. We will hold the story in our hearts, hoping for greater worship and splendor as the promise is fulfilled in Bethlehem.

May our God be glorified in your heart this Advent year. May your life grow in awe over the birth of our Risen King!

With Anticipation,
Dave Snyder



December 1
What Is Advent All About?

I wonder if you are new to this whole Advent idea. As a kid, I thought Advent meant receiving chocolates each morning on a journey to Christmas Day. This year, my son Elias wants his Advent calendar to be full of baseball cards! Advent carries many traditions in many families. This month, we aim to journey together through the Gospel narrative, especially the scene in Bethlehem. Ultimately, we all must answer the question: Why did Jesus come? I believe you will find the answer and so much more. Are you ready? Take a few moments and read Mark 10:45. Let the verse stick in your heart and mind.

Advent is about Jesus coming into the world. The focus is on Jesus. Hebrews 1:3 says He is "The radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature." He came as a baby and died on the cross as a man to forgive our sins and assure us of our heavenly home. He came to give His life as a ransom for YOU. R. Kent Hughes declares, "The truth is, even if Christ were born in Bethlehem a thousand times but not within you, you would be eternally lost. The Christ who was born into the world must be born in your heart. "Religious sentiment, even at Christmastime, without the living Christ is a yellow brick road to darkness." Let that Gospel truth saturate your soul today.

Today, pray that your heart is prepared this month. Look with joy at Jesus, who gave himself to die for your sins and to grant you eternal life. Trust Him with every day of your life. Perhaps with some of you, that day begins now.

[1] Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! [2] Let the
redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble [3] and gathered in from the
lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. [4] Some wandered in
desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in; [5] hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within
them. [6] Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. [7] He
led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in. [8] Let them thank the Lord for his
steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! [9] For he satisfies the longing soul,
and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

[10] Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in affliction and in irons, [11] for they
had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High. [12] So he bowed
their hearts down with hard labor; they fell down, with none to help. [13] Then they cried to the Lord
in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. [14] He brought them out of darkness and
the shadow of death, and burst their bonds apart. [15] Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,
for his wondrous works to the children of man! [16] For he shatters the doors of bronze and cuts in
two the bars of iron.

[17] Some were fools through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction;
[18] they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. [19] Then they cried to the
Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. [20] He sent out his word and healed
them, and delivered them from their destruction. [21] Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,
for his wondrous works to the children of man! [22] And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving,
and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!

[23] Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters; [24] they saw the deeds
of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep. [25] For he commanded and raised the stormy wind,
which lifted up the waves of the sea. [26] They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths;
their courage melted away in their evil plight; [27] they reeled and staggered like drunken men and
were at their wits' end. [28] Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from
their distress. [29] He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. [30] Then they
were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. [31] Let them
thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! [32] Let them
extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.

[33] He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground, [34] a fruitful land into a salty
waste, because of the evil of its inhabitants. [35] He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched
land into springs of water. [36] And there he lets the hungry dwell, and they establish a city to live
in; [37] they sow fields and plant vineyards and get a fruitful yield. [38] By his blessing they multiply
greatly, and he does not let their livestock diminish.

[39] When they are diminished and brought low through oppression,
evil, and sorrow, [40] he pours contempt on princes and makes
them wander in trackless wastes; [41] but he raises up the needy
out of affliction and makes their families like flocks. [42] The
upright see it and are glad, and all wickedness shuts its
mouth. [43] Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things;
let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord.

Psalm 107



December 2
Christ-Centered Anticipation

This time of year is very exciting. With the sounds, sights, and smells of Christmas circling our lives, we can't help but feel more excited than in the other eleven months of the year. Excitement isn't just reserved for kids this time of year…I know plenty of adults who share the same anticipation (ahem, this author). Christmas brings joyful anticipation for peace, hope, joy, and love shared with many. From a movie to a song shared with family and friends, this is a month to remember.

Yet in all our anticipation, let our joy center on Jesus. Take just a few minutes and read Psalm 107. In this rich text, the Psalmist shows what God has done for His children and the love He has shown them. The Psalmist highlights God's mercy and grace, not punishment, toward His people. The response to God's grace and mercy is…thanksgiving. Not last month's holiday, but the song of our hearts in response to God's steadfast love.

What is the song of your life? I love going to baseball games and hearing the walk-up songs for players. A friend in ministry likes to ask others what their walk-up song in life would be. It serves as a good icebreaker for conversations. I'm curious, what would your walk-up song be?

Let the redeemed of the Lord sing today!! Let our lives reflect the new song of salvation (Psalm 40:3). Jesus came to give you and me mercy and grace. He died so we can be forgiven. He rose again so we can experience victory over sin and death. Rejoice today in your gift of salvation!

Today, pray that your excitement and anticipation are centered on Jesus. Pray that this month, your focus is on salvation arriving in Bethlehem.

17 "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as
did also your rulers. 18 But what God foretold by the mouth of
all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He thus fulfilled.
19 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be
blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the
presence of the Lord, and that He may send the Christ
appointed for you, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive until
the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke
by the mouth of His holy prophets long ago. 22 Moses said,
'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from
your brothers. You shall listen to Him in whatever he tells you.
23 And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that
prophet shall be destroyed from the people.' 24 And all the
prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who
came after him, also proclaimed these days. 25 You are the
sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with
your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall
all the families of the earth be blessed.' 26 God, having raised
up His servant, sent Him to you first, to bless you by turning
every one of you from your wickedness."

Acts 3:17 26

December 3
Blessings Promised

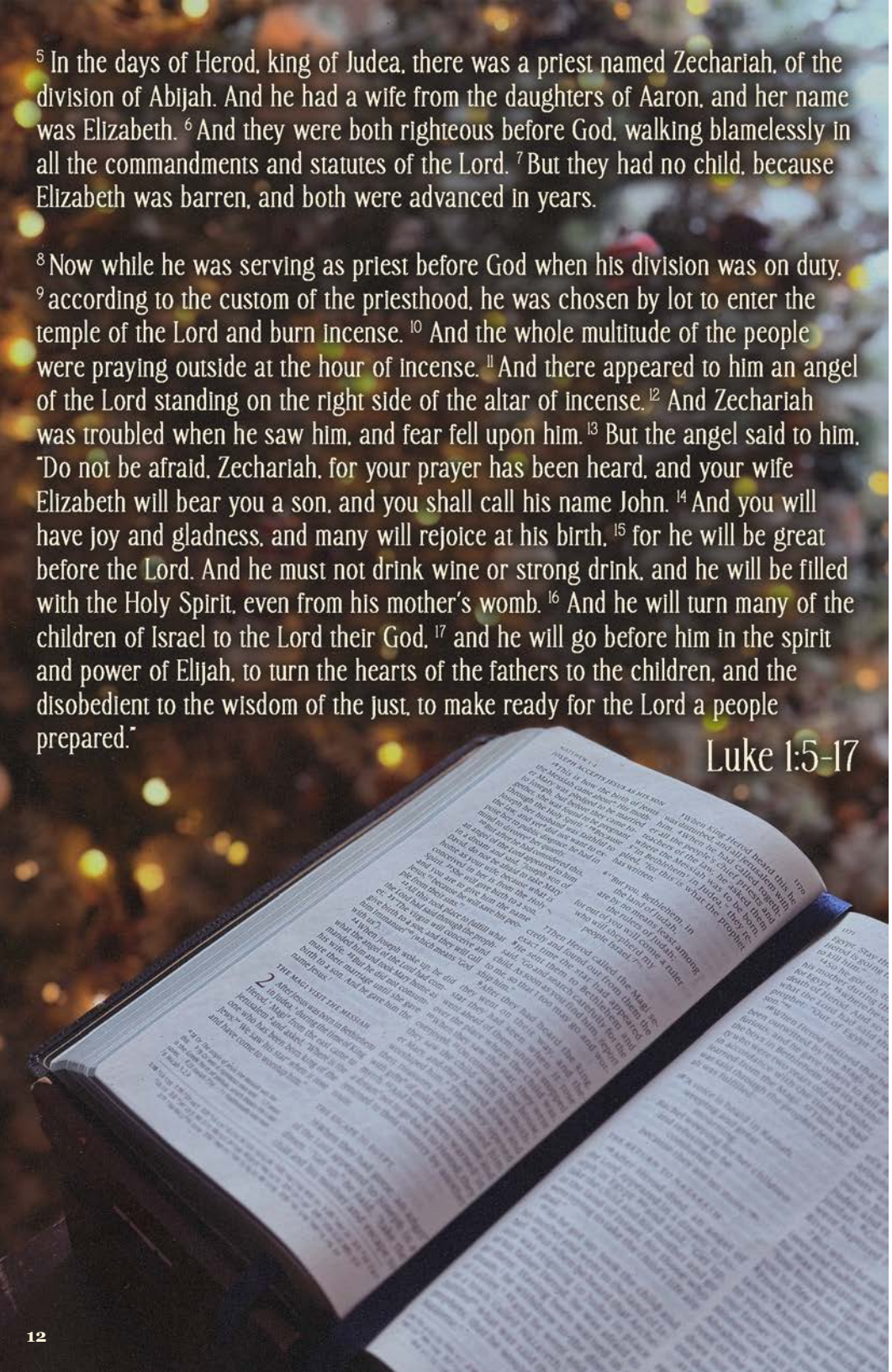
Take a few moments and read Acts 3:22-26. Today's passage contains an incredible account of foretold blessings. Peter found himself at the eastern wall of the temple area, known as Solomon's Portico. In his address to the people, Peter referred to Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15 and pointed to Jesus as the fulfillment of the promised blessing. In the next verse, Peter drew attention to Deuteronomy 18:19, showing the danger of rejecting the Savior's blessing. Today's text should help you see Jesus as the promised blessing from our gracious Father in heaven.

Blessings come in many ways, shapes, and forms. I remember one Christmas morning several years ago when we lived in Birmingham. We finished breakfast and were about to open presents in the living room. At the time, it was just 3 of us. Eden was two years old and excited for the day. For the longest time, I wanted a white Christmas. Growing up in St. Louis, we had many snow days around the holidays. However, it was rare in Birmingham, AL. Yet, on that cold morning, we saw snow fall. At first, I thought I was imagining it. As I walked toward the back door, snow was already blanketing our back deck. We quickly put on our winter clothes and made memories outside. I can still feel that blessed memory deep inside my soul.

Look back with me into the vault of your Christmas memories. Can you find a few thoughts that show you blessings fulfilled during the holidays? Maybe it was a loved one returning home, or a last-minute bonus that helped you buy gifts. Maybe it was your last Christmas with a loved one before he or she went to glory? This time of year can bring many blessings, but also hard times. No matter where you are in this Advent season, look to Jesus. He fulfills God's promised blessing.

Place today in the care of the most blessed Savior. See Him as the greatest treasure you have ever received this side of heaven. You can live today with hope because, in Jesus, you are eternally blessed. You are forgiven, loved, and welcomed in the family of God forever. Rejoice.

Today, pray that Jesus' eternal blessings cover your day. Remind yourself of the Gospel and may the victory of Jesus be your life and purpose. Trust me, you can experience a blessing today!



December 4
The Great Messenger

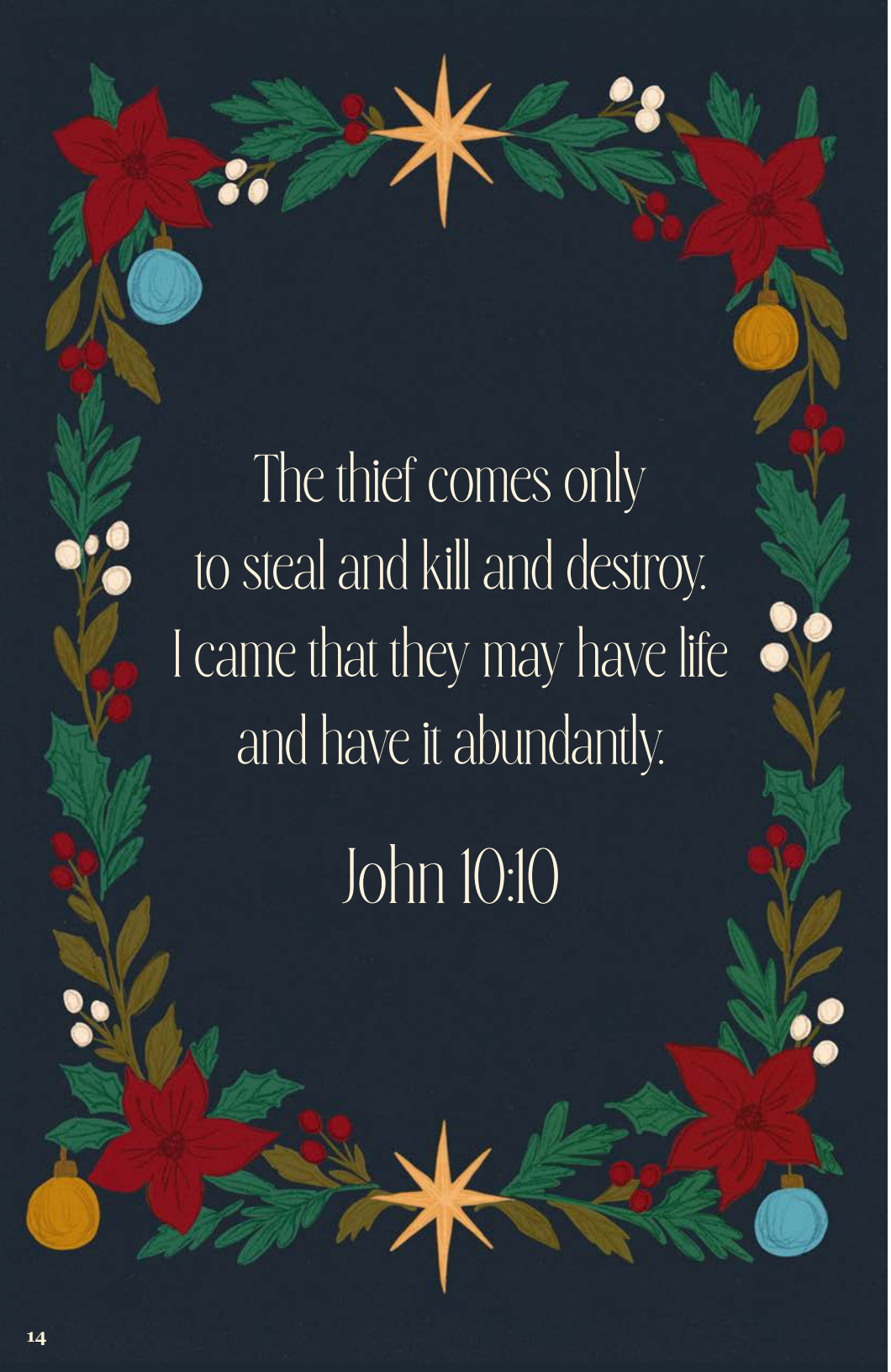
Do you think of John the Baptist during Christmas time? If you are like me, the thought of him doesn't cross my radar during the most wonderful time of the year. Yet, tucked inside Luke's Gospel, we see a strong message of His arrival and importance to the story. Take just a few minutes and read Luke 1:5-17. Make sure you highlight the details of the birth foretold by the angel of the Lord.

John the Baptist served as an Advent role as he prepared Israel for the King's message. He went ahead of Jesus and proclaimed Him in the wilderness as the Lamb of God (John 1:29). He brought forth His Name and message, preparing many for salvation. As a humble messenger, Jesus called him great (Matthew 11:11). He came to serve and support the mission of glory on the earth. He was prepared and made sure many were, too.

Sometimes one of the greatest jobs I've had was being a messenger of good news for someone. Often, when someone has specific needs, others jump at the opportunity to meet them. As a pastor, I have been asked to deliver the good news of benevolence and support. I love sharing the good news that someone loves them and wants to take care of them!

Are you prepared for heaven? Do you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Are you living your life as His messenger, advancing His kingdom on this earth? Perhaps this Advent season is your time to be a messenger of good news.

Today, pray for a healthy kingdom focus on this earth. Live your life with the goal of making Jesus' message known to all. Prepare yourself and others for the joy of His arrival, life, death, resurrection, and return.

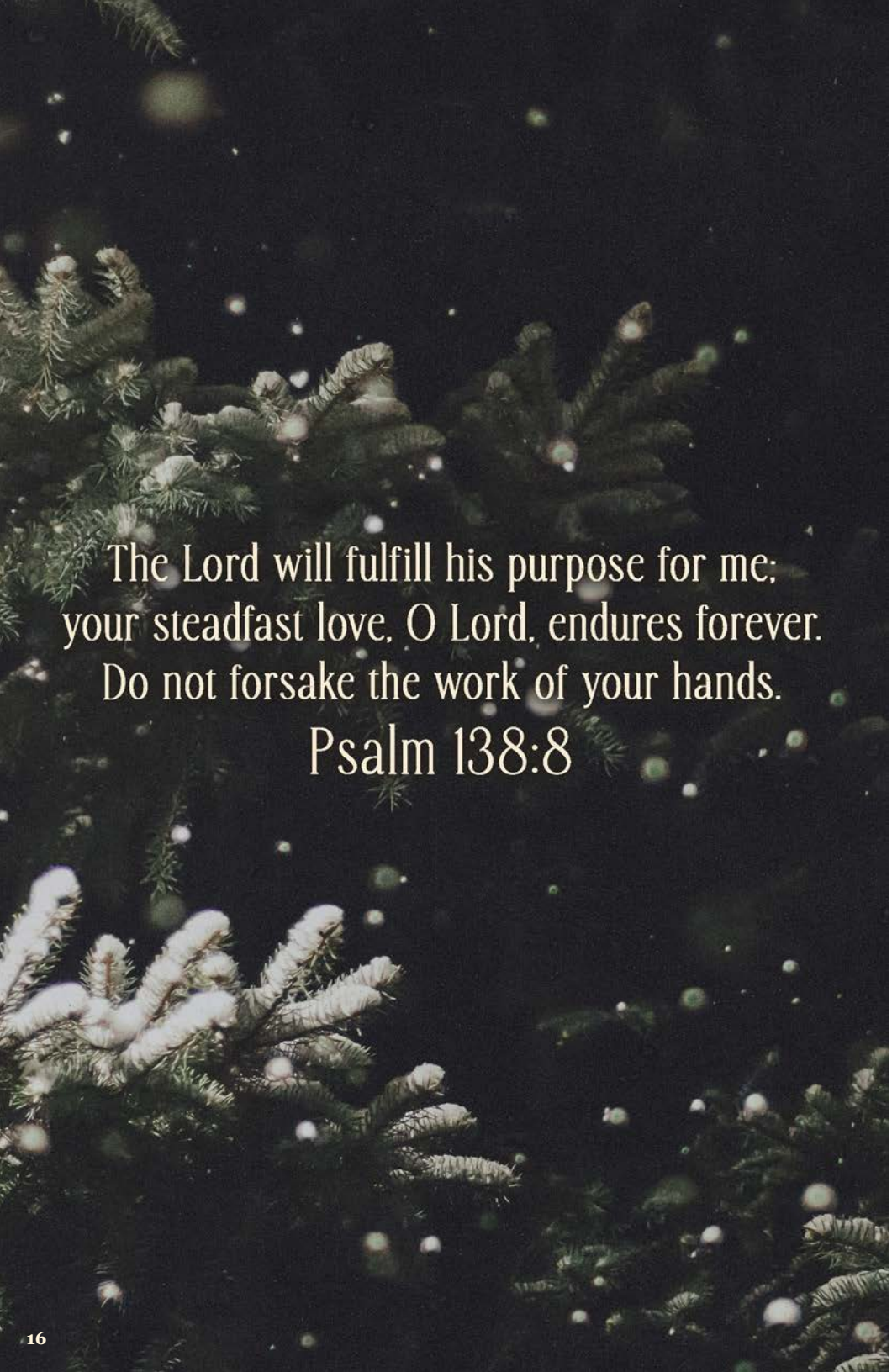


December 5
Restless During the Holidays

For some, Advent brings sadness, sorrow, and restlessness. Remembering those who were once in the living room or at the dinner table can bring tears and pain. Many will feel loss this time of year. As you return to the file cabinet of rich memories in your heart, remember Jesus came to give you life. You don't have to let this Advent season pass in pain and regret. Take just a few moments and read John 10:10. Read it a few times. After you read it, spend a few moments in prayer, asking the Lord to reveal to you hope and joy on this day.

What did today's verse reveal? Jesus came at Christmas, so you and I can have life…and that life is abundant! When I think of an abundant life, I think of joy beyond measure. It pictures hope and the anticipation of heavenly reward. Sorrows may indeed last through the night, but joy always comes in the morning (Psalm 30:5). Place your sadness, your pain, and your sorrow in the Shepherd's care. The adversary comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Yet, Jesus has a better message. He came to give life. He came to give victory. He came to save. He came to give you peace during your pain. Let your gracious Savior care for you.

Today, pray that you will see the abundant life Jesus has given. Share your heart with Him as you talk to Him about your struggles. Remember, He came to give you a life far better than this world's pain.



December 6
Life With Purpose

This week, we will examine Jesus' earthly parents. It is important for you and me to understand why we were put on this earth. We exist to glorify our Father, by following His Spirit in sharing the story of Jesus. God can use every soul on the planet. This Advent season, I want you to see your life as a window through which all can see God's glory, splendor, and majesty. Like Mary and Joseph, your life matters. Don't ever believe otherwise! Take a few moments and read today's brief verse. Write out what comes to your mind that applies to your life.

The Lord's purpose is for us to see, believe, and live in the power of His steadfast love. In Jesus, we have been given this love and assurance. During the holidays, it is easy to get distracted by false promises of purpose and even love. Don't believe for a second that anything on this earth is more important or trustworthy than the One who gave you life. He fulfills His purpose in you daily through your faith and obedience. Trust Him in the fullness of Advent, and may that trust translate into action. Share the Gospel story with a family member, friend, neighbor, or co-worker. Perhaps the greatest gift you can give someone is the message of God's steadfast love through Jesus' mercy. That is one of many ways life can have glorious purpose.

He loves you. He wants to use you today for His great glory. Trust Him and soak in His steadfast love. See your life as an instrument in His grand symphony…and He wants to use you! As we will see in the next several days, that love was born in a manger.

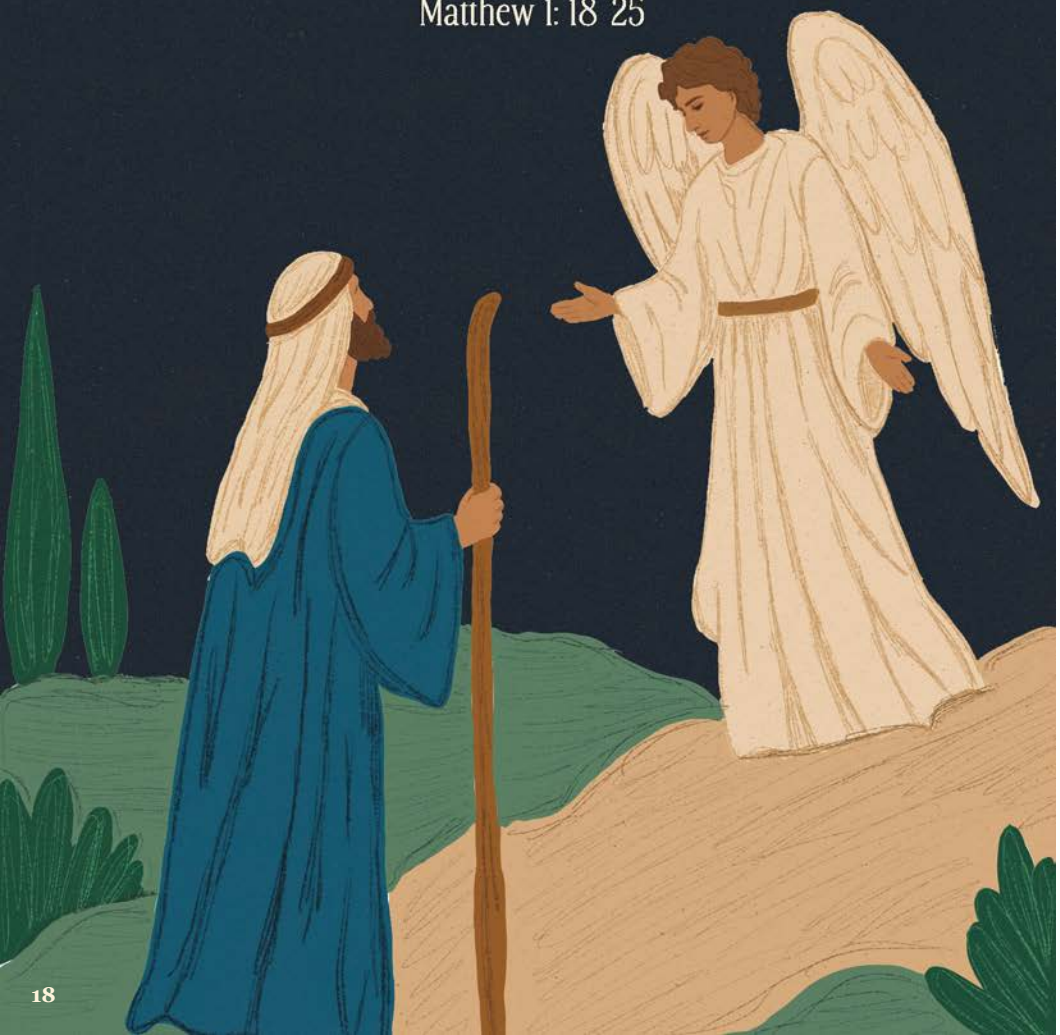
Today, look for ways to glorify God in your life. In faith and obedience, share the steadfast love of a Risen Savior with someone. Pray that God will point you toward a life worth living.

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ[a] took place in this way. When his mother Mary had
been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child
from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put
her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 But as he considered these things,
behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of
David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is
from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he
will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had
spoken by the prophet:

23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel"

(which means, God with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of
the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given
birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Matthew 1: 18 25



December 7

Joseph: An Example of Bold Faith

Just for a few moments, put yourself in Joseph's shoes (or sandals). Amid the excitement of an engagement, his life changed forever when he learned of an unexpected pregnancy. He learned of it before the angelic visit, which made many wonder how he found out. They had no intimacy, and they spent very little time together. A broken engagement and public shaming of such a scandal would've ruined many lives and created terrible consequences (possible death to Mary). Prior to the angelic message, Joseph planned to divorce her quietly, sparing her life and bringing much accusation to his own. Yet, Joseph trusted, God provided, and the plan of redemption was not stopped. Amen! Please take a few moments and read today's passage.

Joseph exemplified bold faith. He faithfully lived as a dedicated carpenter, working to build a great future for generations to come. Yet, an announcement changed his life. By faith, He followed, and God was glorified. His faith was evident in his determination to do the right thing. His faith showed in trusting God's plans and direction more than leaning on his own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Are you honoring Jesus by faith today? Do you strive to do the right thing? In a world full of wrongs, choose what is right. Often, doing the right thing requires faith and trust in God's goodness over worldly counsel or direction. Is your life an example of bold faith?

Today, pray for the courage to do what is right. See the example of Joseph's decisions, and may they inspire you to be a witness of bold faith.

54 and coming to his hometown he taught
them in their synagogue, so that they were
astonished, and said, "Where did this man
get this wisdom and these mighty works?
55 Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his
mother called Mary? And are not his
brothers James and Joseph and Simon and
Judas? 56 And are not all his sisters with
us? Where then did this man get all these
things?" 57 And they took offense at him. But
Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without
honor except in his hometown and in his
own household." 58 And he did not do many
mighty works there, because
of their unbelief.

Matthew 13:54-58

December 8

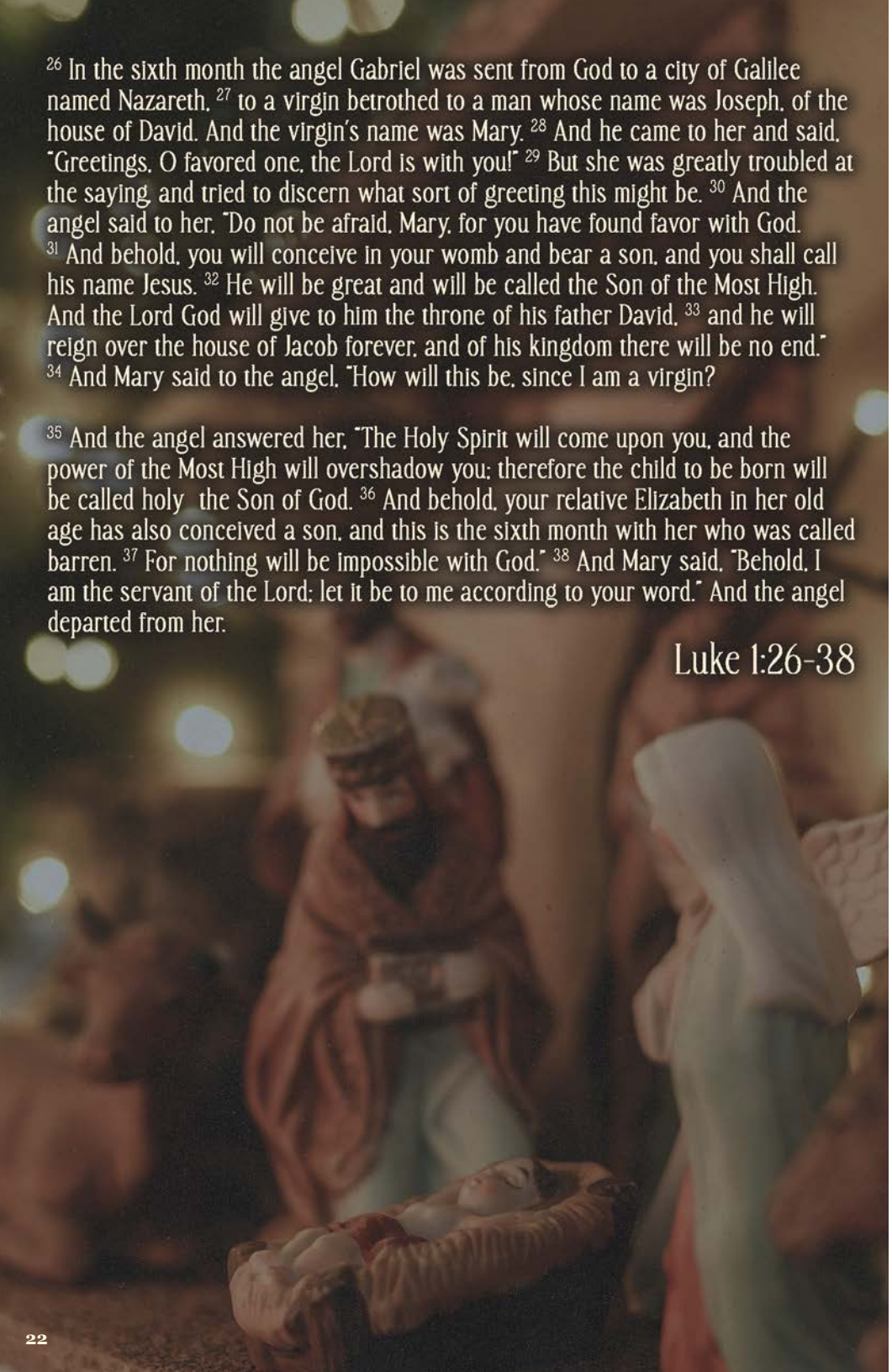
Joseph: A Parent of Commitment

In our culture today, we have lost the importance of commitment. Many years ago, while in college, I upset a dear friend by not honoring a commitment. I promised to pick him up for a friend gathering but totally forgot. I failed to follow through. Any of us can let our guard down and neglect our commitments. Here, Joseph committed to raising the Christ child along with Mary. How well did he do with his commitment? Take a few moments and read today's passage.

You'll notice Jesus is identified as "The carpenter's son." It's an interesting way to identify him in that culture. Jesus was raised in the home of a dedicated father. We know he grew in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52). We also know his parents honored God by taking care of the Son of Man in faith. We know little about Joseph after Jesus grows up, but we do know he did his job. Daniel Darling writes, "We can assume, without stretching the story too much, that Joseph patiently fathered Jesus, teaching Him the Old Testament Scriptures, teaching Him to build his carpentry shop, and modeling for his young son what faithful manhood looks like" (The Characters of Christmas, p. 27). He demonstrated commitment. He exhibited loyalty and intentionality. Oh, how I would love to see fathers committed to their families in a way that glorifies Jesus and expands the Kingdom in this world.

This Advent season, look at all your commitments. Are you showing faithfulness and dedication? Are you passing on a legacy of service and love?

Today, pray for focus and determination to honor your commitments. Examine what is important and what is distracting. Look to Joseph as an example of commitment.



December 9
Mary: A Woman of Humble Surrender

In God's remarkable time, He sent Gabriel to visit a teenage girl named Mary. In the small town of Nazareth in Galilee, the Gospel message was shared. From the way Mary is described, she seems to have been a woman of faith. God, showing amazing favor, chose her to bring the Savior into the world. Take a few moments and read today's passage. I encourage you to read it a few times so the story stays in your heart.

Mary is remembered in many wonderful ways. I like to remember her as an example of humble surrender. Luke 1:38 serves as a pivotal verse for her heart. She was willing to trust God's plan to glorify Him and raise up the Messiah. She asked an honest question, knowing her position as a virgin. Receiving a perfect answer, she humbly surrendered to the call and carried the hope for the world.

This Advent, take Mary's example into your own life. Are you living a life of humble surrender to God's magnificent plans? Sometimes we don't understand what He is doing…but we can find rest in the truth of His love and goodness for us. Sometimes His call changes our life plans. In moments of life change, keep trusting the Father with humble surrender. He loves, He knows, He leads, and He provides. Mary found that to be true in her own life of obedience.

Today, pray for humble surrender to the plans of God. Trust Him with every change you may experience in life. He interrupted a teenage girl's plans and gave us the Savior as the reward. He is faithful over you. You can rest in that promise today.



[46] And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,
[47] and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior;
[48] for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me
blessed; [49] for He who is mighty has done great things for
me, and holy is His name. [50] And His mercy is for those
who fear Him from generation to generation. [51] He has
shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud
in the thoughts of their hearts; [52] He has brought down
the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble
estate; [53] He has filled the hungry with good things, and the
rich He has sent away empty. [54] He has helped His servant
Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, [55] as He spoke to our
fathers, to Abraham and to His offspring forever."

Luke 1:46-55

December 10
Mary: An Expression of Joyful Worship

Today's reading is a treasure of worship. Luke 1:46-55 is known as the Magnificat (from the Latin word for magnifies: "My soul magnifies the Lord"). Following Gabriel's visit and Mary's visit to Elizabeth, her soul was full of worship. Her response to the message of salvation promised in the miraculous conception was praise and adoration. Think about the joy she experienced! She was chosen to carry and raise the Son of God. She was blessed with a mission and purpose unlike any human had ever received. Take a few minutes and absorb Mary's song of praise.

During the holiday season, we hear many songs. Some glorify Jesus, while others try to lighten the holiday mood. On the radio, we hear powerful songs like Hark! The Herald Angels Sing, followed by the silliness of Last Christmas (my least favorite). Christmas brings songs of many kinds…what songs do you sing? I'm one of those strange ones that begins listening to Christmas music before Thanksgiving. There is just something about Christmas music that soothes the soul.

Please note the posture of humility Mary displays in Luke 1:43, 48. She didn't bring entitlement to her song, but rather deep gratitude. She recognized the privilege of God using her to carry out His plans on earth. She didn't make it about her name or honor, but His.

During the busyness of Advent, make sure your song is Christ-exalting worship. See that gift of salvation in the manger as God's promise of love and forgiveness for you. Mary made the moment of God's glory. Let's follow her example by making Christmas moments of Jesus.

Today, examine your heart, soul, and mind. Who or what do you worship this Christmas season? How do you respond to God's love and faithfulness today? Respond to the Lord today with joyful worship.

[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.

Luke 2:1-5



December 11
Mary & Joseph: Journey To Bethlehem

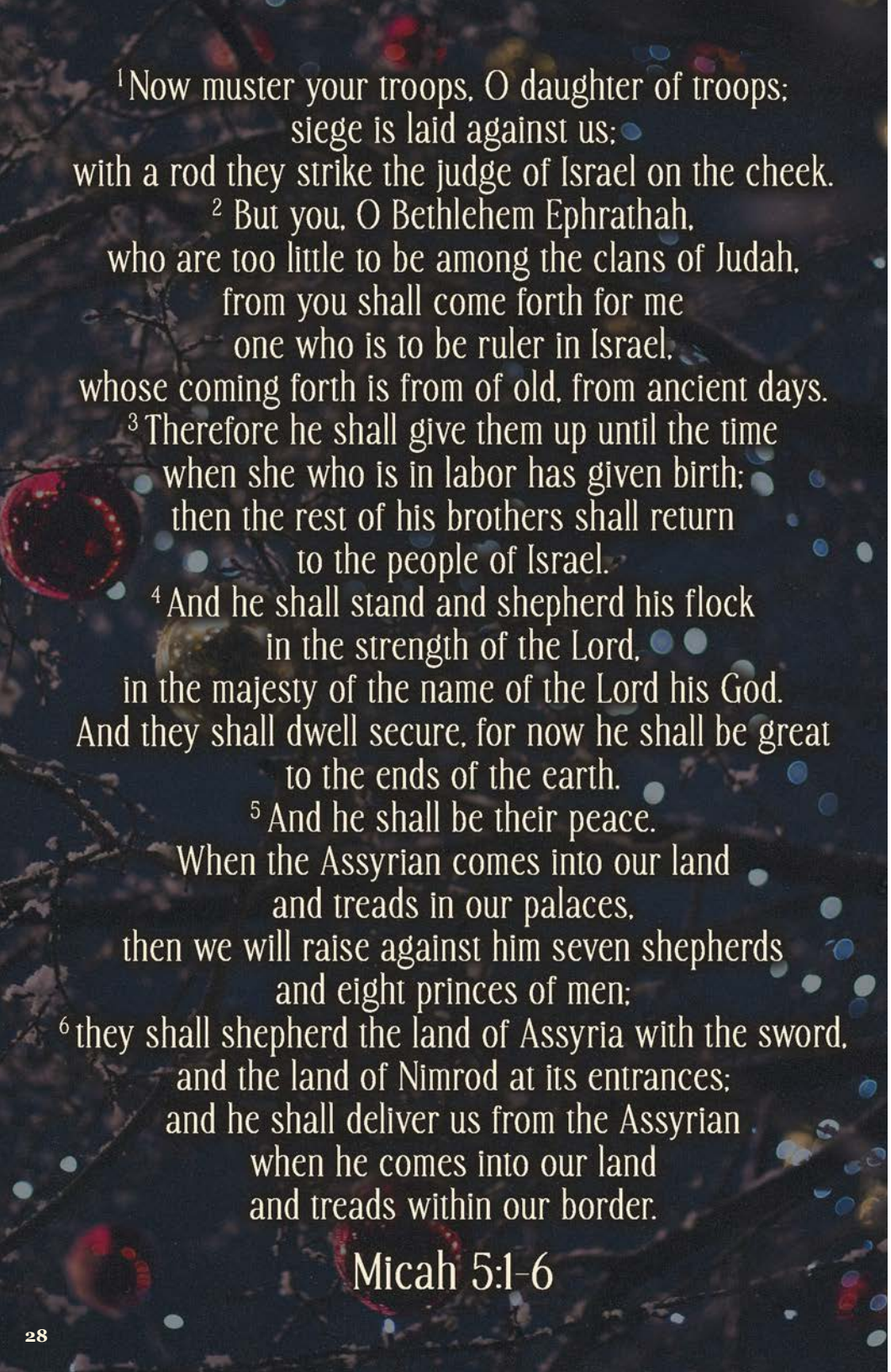
So often, during Christmas, we read Luke 2 and skip over important details. Mary and Joseph's journey together expressed both faith and obedience. As the chosen couple to bring Christ into the world, they knew the journey would involve radical dependency on God's strength. Read Luke 2:1-5 and avoid skipping over the details. Allow the scene to capture your mind and heart.

Have you ever been on a long car ride during the holidays? Before Brooke's parents moved to Pensacola, one of our traditions was driving to Yorktown, VA for the final week of December. The drive from our driveway to Brooke's parents' driveway in Virginia was 915 miles. We have been those people crazy enough to make the drive in one day. That doesn't happen anymore when you're traveling with children. Now we struggle to drive more than 5 hours! On those long car rides, patience is greatly tested. It sounds bad, but not really. We drive in the comfort of a large SUV and the privilege of hotel lodging on the way. Mary and Joseph's journey…not so much.

Their journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem would take 4-7 days, depending on weather and physical ability, and required many hours of travel. Many estimate it was close to a 90-mile journey. Mary, a young but very pregnant woman, showed great courage and trust in following the required census. Joseph, trusting God while loving his wife, showed great strength on the journey. They traveled as a team, led by the Spirit, preparing to deliver the Son.

Faith and obedience are not always easy. Life brings moments when trials and difficulties become hurdles in your journey. Perhaps this has been a difficult year for you. Yet here you are at Advent, looking forward to celebrating the birth of our Savior. The journey has been difficult for so many of us. Today, look at Mary and Joseph's incredible journey. See their willingness to go where God needed them so He could give us His Son. Their journey was arduous, yet they overcame. You can overcome as well.

Today, pray for strength in your journey. Perhaps the road to this Christmas has been difficult. You are in good company! God not only knows; He also guarantees strength and victory. Trust Him today. Rejoice, for the journey to Bethlehem gave us the blessing of salvation.



December 12
Hope Found In Promised Fulfilled

The world was broken as Jesus' earthly parents arrived in Bethlehem. Hope may have been hard to see as Mary and Joseph desperately searched for a place to stay. Sadly, as the story continues, the inn has no rooms left. One of my favorite songs this time of year is While You Were Sleeping by Casting Crowns. The song has this powerful line:

Oh Bethlehem, what you have missed while you were sleeping,
For God became a man and stepped into your world today,
Oh Bethlehem, you will go down in history
As a city with no room for its King while you were sleeping.

Think about what happened when these faithful, soon-to-be parents arrived in Bethlehem. No place to sleep! No guaranteed roof over their heads or a dependable place to lay down. For most people, this is awful. For a pregnant lady, this is beyond awful. Yet this was part of God's great design for redemption. Micah 5:1-6 painted the picture before the scene occurred.

Instead of coming to earth amid fanfare and in lavish settings, the King of Glory and God's own Son was born among animals. He came on a rescue mission: to save us from our sins and give us everlasting life. Jesus, the hope of glory, fulfilled the OT prophecies. By God's grace and plan, Mary and Joseph experienced God's promises being fulfilled.

I'm not sure what is happening in your world today, but God knows. Trust Him and cling to His promises fulfilled in Jesus. Sin was paid, death was defeated, and redemption was poured out. Rejoice!

Today, remind yourself of God's promises. Take a tour through the Bible's promises made and kept. Spend time in prayer, meditating on God's promises.



December 13
The Shepherds: Unexpected Worshippers

If you've been in church during Christmas or seen nativity scenes outside, you have seen shepherds in the story. In our world, shepherds are often connected to kids dressing up with a staff in hand. It usually makes for a great photo op. Yet, in the redemption story, including such lower-class worshippers radiated God's love and grace. Jerusalem celebrities could've been chosen to participate in the worship service, yet God brought the message to shepherds. There is plenty of room for you and me in the chorus of worship. Never forget that during Christmas. Read Luke 2:8-18 and spend some time focusing on the shepherds. I'll wait.

Wide awake and responsible for protecting the sheep, these faithful workers caught a glimpse of God's glory in the sky. I love the picture Luke paints here. The sky opened, and the heavenly host declared their adoration to the King born in Bethlehem. I imagine for a moment or two, these shepherds weren't thinking of sheep! Taking the angelic message to their hearts, they journeyed to Bethlehem and met Jesus.

The shepherd's presence in the Christmas story gives all an open invitation. There is room for more to see Jesus. Social status, wealth, popularity, power, or prestige are not requirements to see Jesus. He came for all...including the least of these.

Today, you are welcome to worship Jesus. You are invited daily to enjoy the treasure of His infinite worth and live with invincible forgiveness. You belong to Him.

[1] Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold,
wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, [2] saying, "Where is he who has been born king
of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." [3] When
Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; [4] and assembling
all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to
be born. [5] They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

[6] "'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.'"

[7] Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the
star had appeared. [8] And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for
the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship
him." [9] After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they
had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the
child was. [10] When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. [11] And
going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and
worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and
frankincense and myrrh. [12] And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they
departed to their own country by another way.

Matthew 2:1-12



December 14
The Wise Men: Curious Worshippers

When you see the nativity scene, you notice three wise men. We're not exactly sure if three went. What we do know is the three gifts given to the Savior, assuming one person delivered each gift. Regardless of how many made the journey to see the Christ child. Take a few moments and get the story in your mind and heart. You may want to read it a few times.

A wicked monster named Herod sent Magi to locate the Messiah, not for a desire to worship, but a mission to kill. Herod couldn't stand another with more power and glory than himself…especially a baby! The motive was more like a covert operation, but it ended in worship. Matthew 2:11 paints a beautiful picture of how these royal messengers responded. Instead of returning to the king, they went another way…because they found a better King.

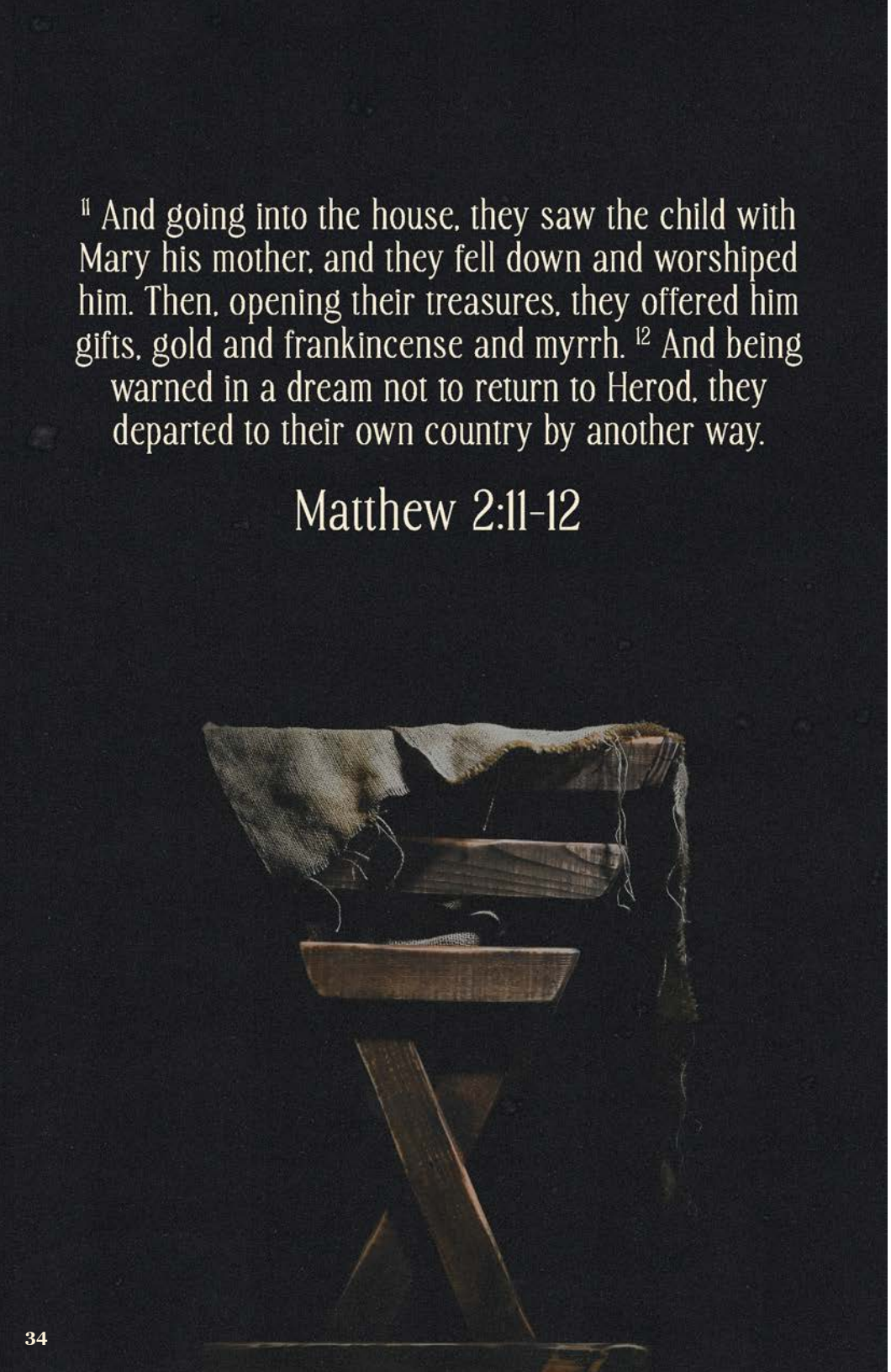
Can you imagine their curiosity as they traveled from Jerusalem? Perhaps thoughts of prophecies fulfilled, and mysteries explained clouded their minds like a thick fog. Arriving at the scene, their curiosity turned into awe. They were in the presence of the Savior and left forever changed.

Have you lost your awe this Christmas? Do you still worship with great joy over promises fulfilled in the birth of Jesus? Don't get so busy with your spiritual routine that you lose the blessing of childlike wonder at the Savior's glory.

Today, take time to worship the Savior. Follow the example of the wise men, and may your awe increase with joy and anticipation. Jesus, the better King, has come!

[11] And going into the house, they saw the child with
Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped
him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him
gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. [12] And being
warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they
departed to their own country by another way.

Matthew 2:11-12



December 15
Why Gold?

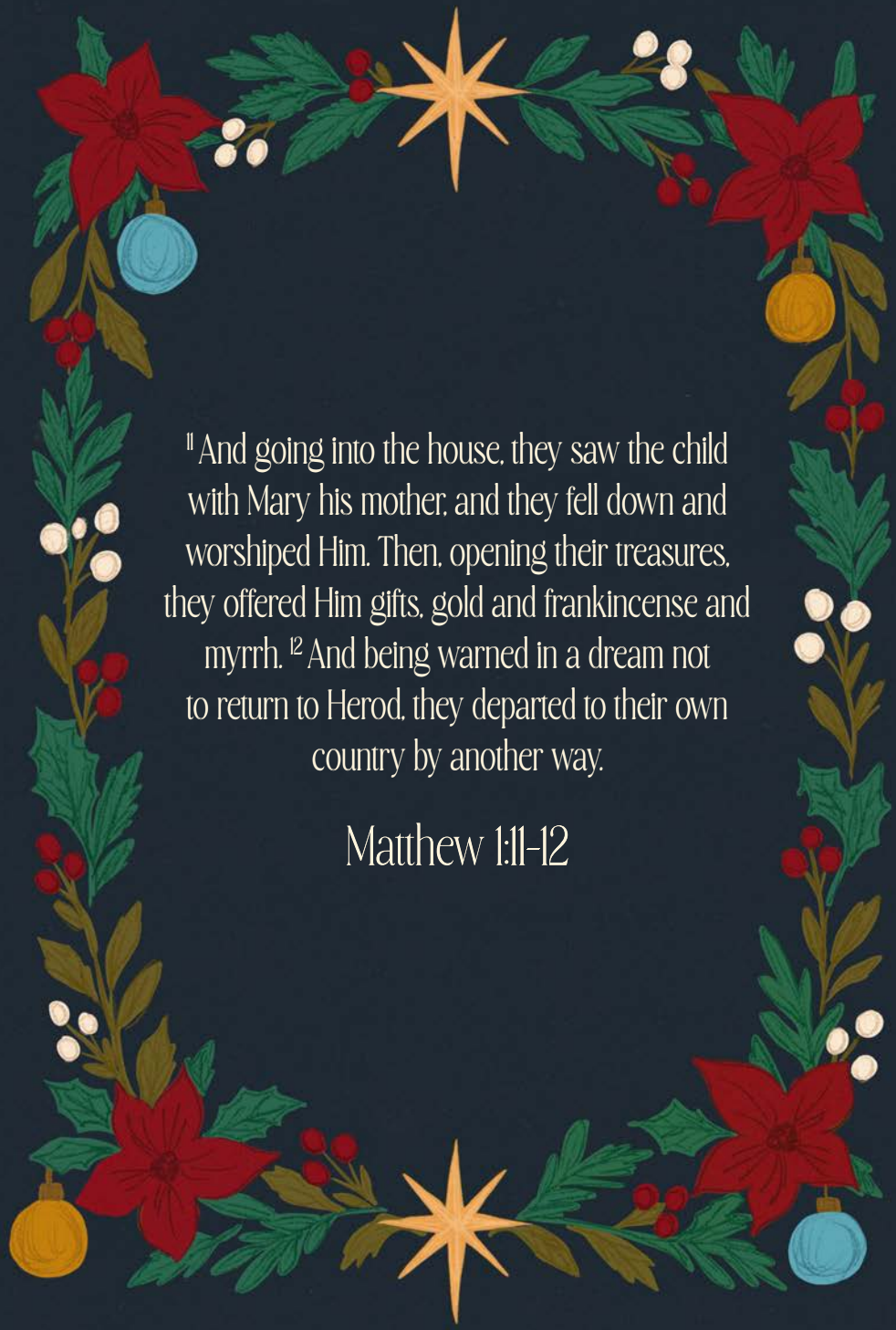
Today, we will examine the three gifts brought to our Savior. These gifts were not unplanned; they were intentional. Today, we will examine the significance of gold as a gift to the Messiah.

Why gold? Of all the gifts to bring to a baby born in humbling circumstances, why bring gold? Today, gold is a valued commodity in the ancient world. Because of its immense value and rarity, gold was often associated with nobility and the wealthy. For example, in 1 Kings 10, the Queen of Sheba brought gold as a gift to King Solomon. Gold was recognizing greatness.

Under the Old Covenant, the Holy of Holies was an inner sanctuary within the temple, where the priest would experience the presence of God and offer a sacrifice of atonement for the people's sins. Similarly, the incarnation of Jesus proclaimed God's presence–Immanuel–and the atoning sacrifice he would make on behalf of his people at the cross. The wise men may have had this connection in mind, with 1 Kings 6:20-22 describing the walls of the Most Holy Place and the altar within it as completely blanketed with gold.

As we look at this gift, we must remember Jesus' greatness. He is worthy of our highest gifts and adoration. This Christmas, make sure Jesus is your treasure above all. He deserves your best giving and sacrifice.

Today, consider what you are giving to kingdom work. As we saw in the gift of gold, Jesus deserves our greatest generosity. Do you recognize His greatness? How do you respond to the King? Spend some time in prayer, seeking Jesus as the greatest treasure of all.



[11] And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. [12] And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Matthew 1:11-12

December 16
Why Frankincense?

Have you ever attended a Christmas party and brought frankincense as a gift? Have you put this gift on your wish list? I'm sure frankincense didn't come to mind when you considered gifts given and received during the holidays. Yet in the Christmas story, this gift beautifully expresses love and gratitude. Just like yesterday, please take a few moments and read today's passage.

Why frankincense? Frankincense is a fragrant gum resin that is still widely used in parts of Africa and the Middle East. It is formed by scraping the bark of certain native trees and then harvesting the resin beads after they dry. When burned as incense, it creates a strong, distinctive aroma. In the ancient Near East, the burning of frankincense was closely associated with ceremonial worship of a god. In this way, offering frankincense as a gift to Jesus may have indicated that the wise men understood the prophecy of the newborn king carried a claim to deity.

Like gold, frankincense may also have implied an association with Old Covenant temple worship. Burning incense at the altar was a key part of the sacrificial system God prescribed for use in the Tabernacle and, later, the temple itself. Frankincense symbolizes holiness and righteousness. The gift of frankincense to the Christ child symbolized His willingness to become a sacrifice, giving Himself up wholly, corresponding to a burnt offering.

Is your life a pleasing aroma to the King of Glory? This Advent, consider what your life communicates to others about Jesus' significance. Are you the aroma of Christ (2 Corinthians 2:15-17)? Are you sharing His love, mercy, and infinite worth to others?

Today, pray that your life reflects the sweet aroma of Christ to others. Make it a point today to bless someone with the Gospel. A great way to start spreading that aroma is by sharing your testimony with others.



11 And going into the house, they saw
the child with Mary his mother, and
they fell down and worshiped Him.
Then, opening their treasures, they
offered him gifts, gold and
frankincense and myrrh.
12 And being warned in a dream not
to return to Herod, they departed to
their own country by another way.

Matthew 1:11-12

December 17
Why Myrrh?

One of the most exciting visits is to a hospital, celebrating a family's new baby. Often, people bring gifts such as stuffed animals, clothes, and sweets for the joyous occasion. Can you imagine bringing myrrh to the new family? The excitement of new life led to the gift of myrrh… what would you do? Like gold and frankincense, we must consider myrrh's significance in the Christmas story. Once again, please look over Matthew 2:11-12.

Myrrh came from Arabia and was obtained from a tree, just like frankincense. It was a spice and was used in embalming. It was also sometimes mixed with wine to form a drink. Such a drink was given to our Savior when He was crucified (Mark 15:23, Matthew 27:34). Myrrh was used to prepare bodies for burial (John 19:39-40). Feasibly, the wise men intended this gift as a sign of Jesus' humanity and the means in which he would save us, by his own death. (Isaiah 53:5).

When we look at this gift, we see the ransom paid for our sins. When we see this gift in the Christmas story, we are reminded of both the darkness of sin and the light of Jesus. This Christmas, remind yourself of the reason why the baby was born. He came to exchange His righteousness for our sinfulness. This is how God demonstrated His love for you!

Today, pray that your heart understands the mission for which Jesus was sent. He came to redeem you. He came to save you. He came to shower you with love from above. Rejoice today in that gift!



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!"

Luke 2:13-14

December 18
The Praises From Angels

Today, we return to the field where the shepherds were 'clocking in' for work. In the middle of their shift, they were unexpectedly invited to a praise chorus in the sky, from angels. Let's be honest. What would you do if angels suddenly interrupted your life? Would you get your phone out for a future social media pic post…or would you hit the floor? I'm not sure what I would do if angels appeared in the sky, praising Jesus before my eyes. Yet here we see them in the Christmas story.

You'll notice the shepherds witnessed a heavenly host of angels. Church hymnals include "The Doxology," one of the faith's great hymns. The hymn contains the line "Praise him above, ye heavenly host." The heavenly hosts are God's holy angels who dwell in God's presence. These angels would've been a great number, forming a celestial army under God's rule and glory. These angels displayed God's power and majesty. They filled the sky on that grandiose night, worshipping the baby born in Bethlehem.

First published in 1855 in the Nouveau Recueil de Cantiques hymn book. "Angels We Have Heard on High" has become a favorite during Advent. With an unknown author, the words and music help paint a picture of the angels' praise that night.

Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plains
And the mountains in reply
Echo back their joyous strains.

Gloria In Excelsis Deo
Gloria In Excelsis Deo

Shepherds, why this jubilee?
Why your joyous strains prolong?
Say what may the tidings be
Which inspire your heavenly song?

Gloria In Excelsis Deo
Gloria In Excelsis Deo

Come to Bethlehem, and see
Him Whose birth the angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee
Christ the Lord, the newborn King.

When you come to a worship gathering, do you prepare to experience God's glory and splendor? Do you anticipate joyfully praising the Name of Jesus? Or do you go through the motions? This Advent, learn from the angels in Luke 2 and praise the Savior! He is, and always will be, worthy of all praise and honor!

Today, look for Bible verses that speak of Jesus' glory and power. Incorporate them into your day as a guide for praise. During a busy holiday season, don't neglect praises to the King.

16 And he told them a parable, saying: "The land
of a rich man produced plentifully, 17 and he
thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have
nowhere to store my crops?' 18 And he said,
'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and
build larger ones, and there I will store all my
grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my
soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for
many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."' 20 But
God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul
is required of you, and the things you have
prepared, whose will they be?' 21 So is the one
who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich
toward God."

Luke 12:16–21

December 19
Stop Worshipping Stuff!

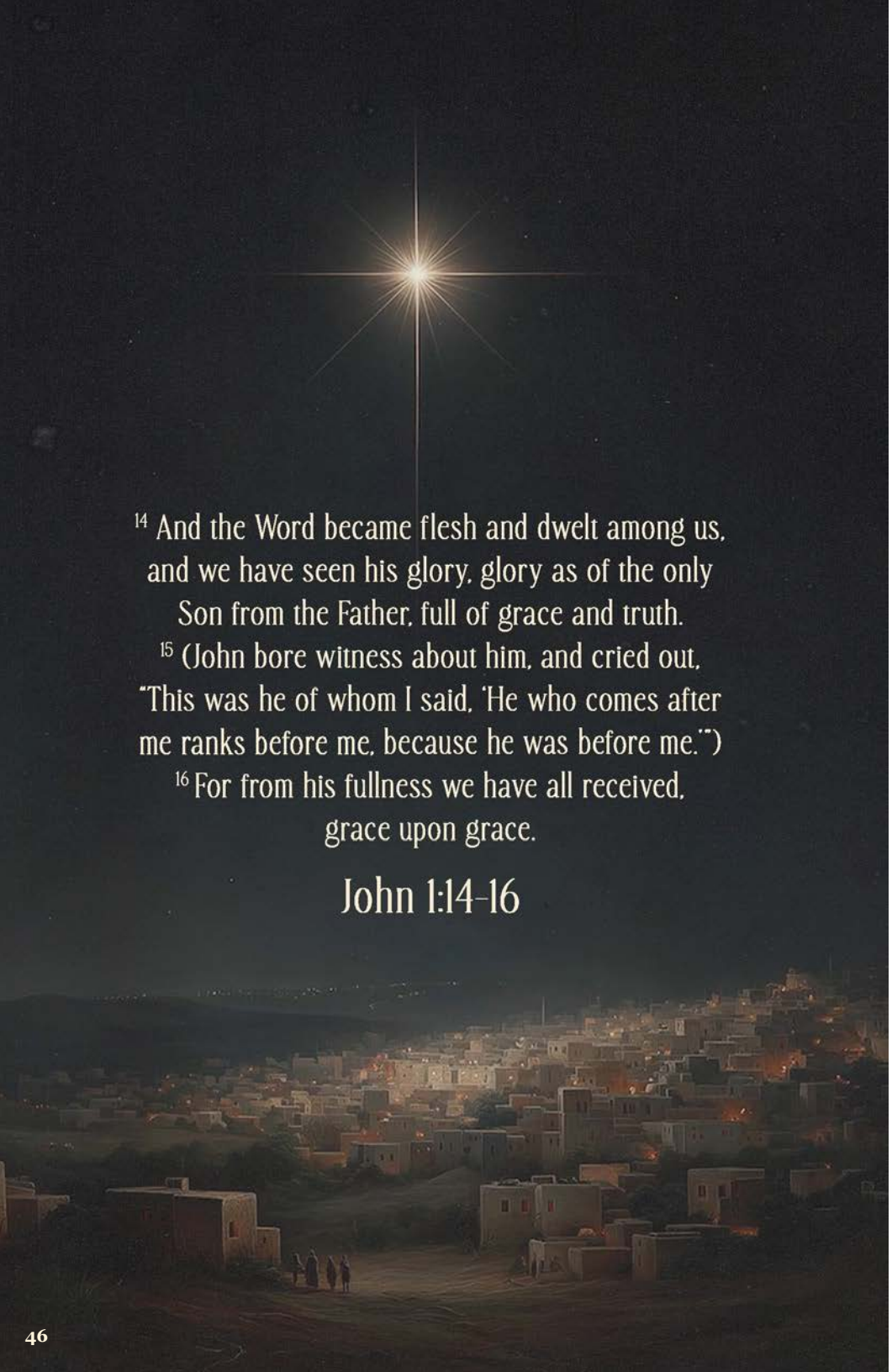
I'm sure with just days before Christmas, you may be in panic mode trying to finish all your holiday shopping. This is the time of year when stuff can interfere with true worship and genuine joy. As you look at presents under the tree, remember those boxes will not last forever. Giving is a joy and receiving is fun. However, let's avoid confusing stuff as the ultimate satisfaction our souls crave in this world.

Materialism is finding comfort and joy in stuff above the Savior. It carries tones of idolatry. When we believe we need stuff for satisfaction, we have dipped into materialism. A great question to ask regarding materialism is: What controls your comfort and joy? Are you satisfied with stuff or the Savior? How is Jesus greater than materialism? How can we look to Him above what is on the store shelf or parked in the car lot?

Materialism convinces us that stuff is more valuable than the Savior. It is foolish to collect and accommodate so much stuff when we know we will leave it here when eternity begins. We need a better mindset about stuff. It is not wrong to have nice things. It is foolish to find more joy in them above the Savior. In this story, the rich man found self-sufficiency in his stuff. Instead of looking to others' needs and living in the joy of the Lord, he found joy in his belongings. What's the stuff in your life? What would happen if that stuff were removed? How would you respond? The answers to these questions will help you identify materialism.

Jesus is greater than materialism because the Gospel never fails. The Gospel is the treasure hidden in a field (Matthew 13:44). The Gospel remains strong in storms (Matthew 7:24-27). The Gospel is what strengthens and satisfies. As you read Luke 12:16-21, you will see the need for something better. How can one be rich toward God? I believe finding joy in His grace and in giving to others creates a deeper appreciation for His riches.

Today, avoid worshipping stuff. The gifts received on Christmas can never compete with the gift of salvation born in Bethlehem. Pray for the ability to enjoy the blessings of gifts without allowing them to control your joy. Pray also for the faith to give more than you receive!



December 20
The Fullness Has Arrived

Fullness arrived at Bethlehem. Hope was born in the manger as Mary and Joseph held the promise of salvation in their arms. In the Living Son, the baby in which angels worshipped, we see joy of advent. For the remaining days, let us keep our eyes on Jesus. Take a few moments and read John 1:14-16. Let the truth steep in your heart.

God so loved the world; He gave us the Word. I love this description of Jesus in John 1. Jesus, the Word, the logos in Greek, is our hope this Advent season. In the Greek worldview, the Logos was thought of as a bridge between God and man. The Father sent the Son to bring us back to Himself. The baby in the manger was God's gift of eternal relationship with fallen humanity. This was no ordinary baby! W. Chatterton Dix, a manager of a marine insurance company in Glasgow, Scotland penned words that attempt to describe the fullness of Jesus as a baby.

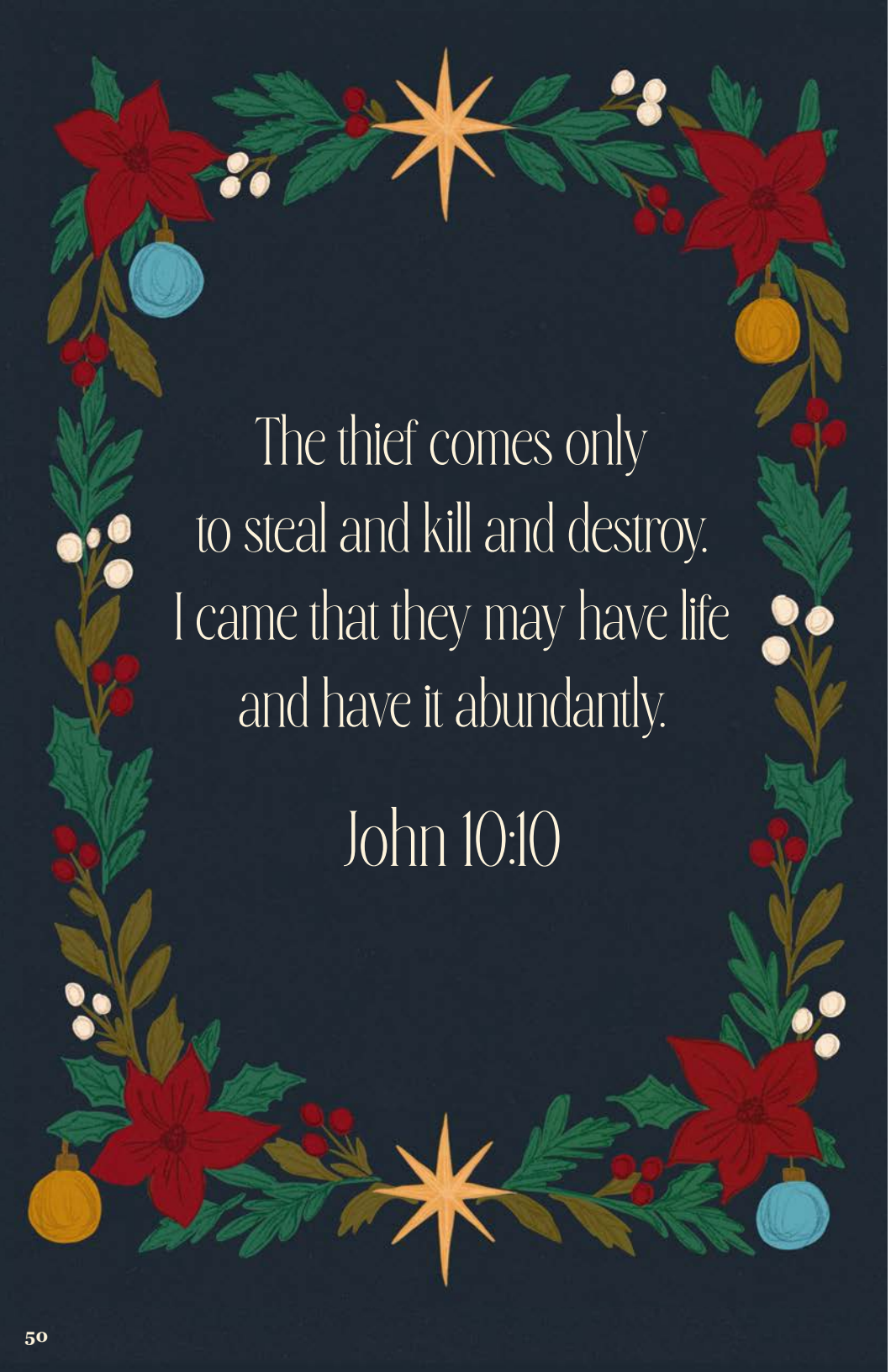
What child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ, the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring Him laud
The Babe, the son of Mary!

Why lies he in such mean estate,
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear: for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the son of Mary!

So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh,
Come peasant king to love Him.
The King of kings salvation brings;
Let loving hearts enthrone Him
This, this is Christ, the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the son of Mary!

In the fullness of Jesus, you and I have received grace upon grace (John 1:16). Don't let this verse slide past your radar. Jesus came to shine God's blazing glory into your life. Jesus came to overwhelm your heart with unrelenting love. This Christmas, enjoy the fullness of Christ Jesus. Rejoice, for that fullness was born in a manger, to transform your soul.

Today, seek the fullness of Christ with joy. See how His amazing love can change your day and give your heart a jubilant rhythm.



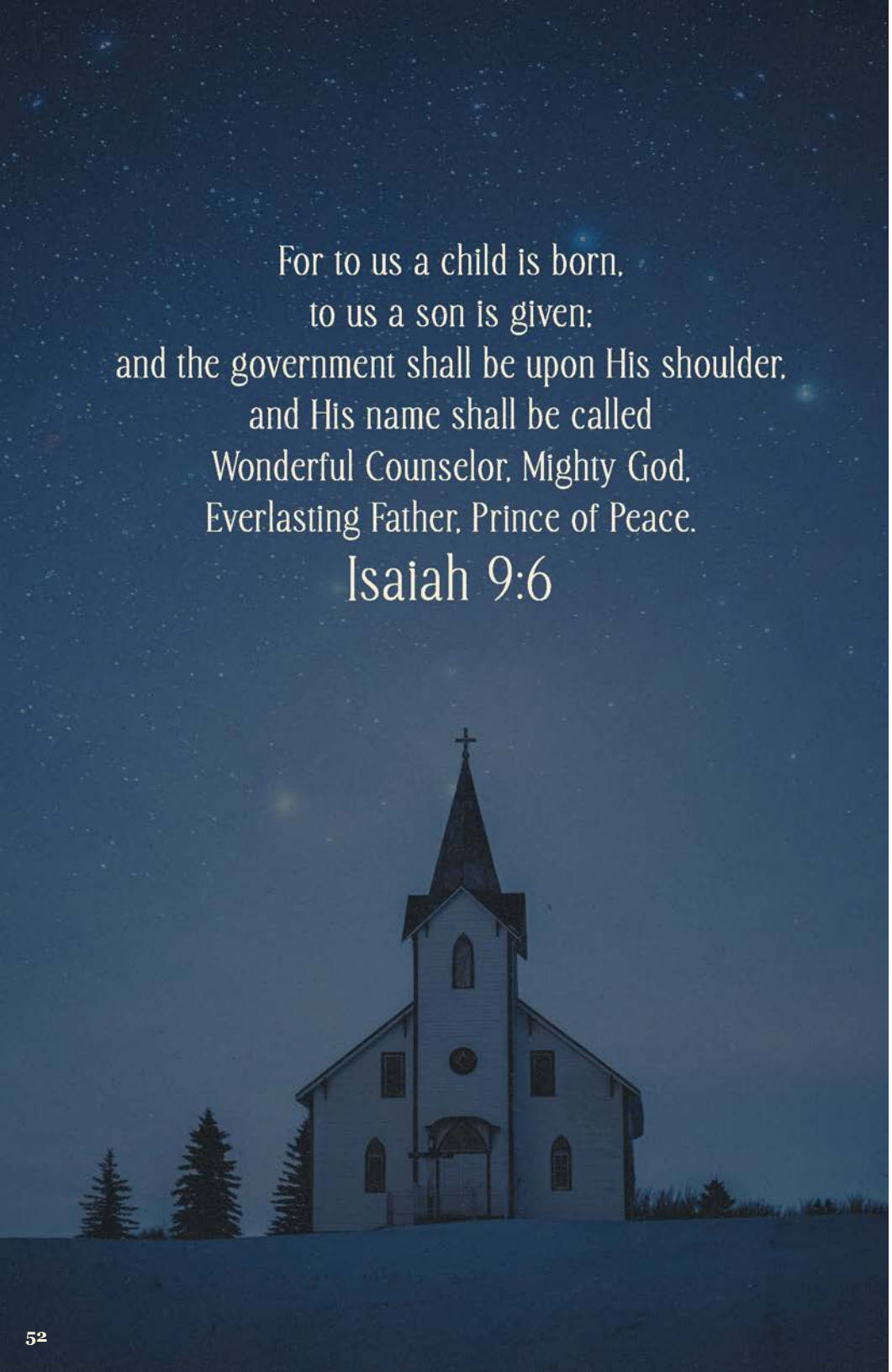
December 21
Jesus Is The Glory of Christmas

We are inching closer to Christmas Day. Are you ready? Are you excited at all? I'm sure you have seen many images representing Christmas. From pictures of Santa, reindeer, elves, gingerbread people, and maybe Charlie Brown. I'm not here to put those images down, but to help draw you to the best image of Christmas: Jesus. Today, I want you to see Jesus as Christmas's glory. Spend a moment in today's reading.

I love how the writer of Hebrews calls Jesus, "The radiance of His glory." This word, radiance, is apaugasma in Greek, which translates "To send forth light." God sent Jesus to Bethlehem, sending forth His light into a dark world. Jesus came as the glory of Christmas, to outshine the darkness with His radiant light and matchless glory. In Him, you can transmit that light to others (Matthew 5:16).

Hebrews continues with teaching us Jesus is the "Exact representation of His being." This word for representation is eikon, which means, "Precise copy." This is where we get the English word for icon. Colossians 1:15 reveals He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. When you think of Christmas, think of Jesus. He is the greatness of Christmas. He is the glory of Christmas.

Today, spend some time looking at Jesus as the glory of Advent. Look for Him in Christmas songs, candles, and traditions. Avoid replacing Him with any other image. He is more worthy. He is more glorious. Spend some time in prayer, praising Him for His greatness!



December 22
A Baby Changed The World

In Mary's arms, a baby changed the world. The church I'm blessed to pastor has experienced a growth in babies! A baby impacts many people. I love seeing new parents hold their babies with excitement and awe. I love watching those babies grow up in our church and seeing God use them in so many ways. Can you imagine what Mary and Joseph must have thought as they held the Savior of the world? Read Isaiah 9:6 today. See what Scripture says about this baby who changed the world.

Who would have thought so much power lay in the promise of a baby? I like what Oswald Chambers wrote, "Jesus Christ founded His kingdom on the weakest link of all: A Baby." Isaiah wrote this passage 800 years before Christ. This period of history was riotous as the Assyrians were on the march, taking people into captivity by the masses. Isaiah's prophecy gave God's people a much-needed hope: a Child would be born to fulfill the Davidic Covenant, and He would bear the titles, "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." A baby changed the world, with descriptions preceding Him in glorious splendor.

This Advent, look at the baby as the One who changed the world. I like how C.S. Lewis pictured this baby: "Once in our world, a stable had something in it that was bigger than our whole world." See Isaiah's description and grow in awe over another promise fulfilled in Bethlehem. Reflect on your own life and how He changed you.

Today, spend some time seeing Jesus as the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. He is no ordinary baby. He came to change the world, which includes…you.



December 23
You Aren't Alone On Christmas

For many, being with family and friends is what makes Christmas time so wonderful. Yet, some battle severe loneliness and hurt during the holiday season. Perhaps I'm speaking to you with that last statement. I have good news as we are just a few days away from Christmas. You don't have to fear being alone! Spend a moment and read Isaiah 7:14.

Jesus is Immanuel, which translates to "God with us." He is with us every step of the way on this side of His glory. During the holiday season, remind your soul of Immanuel. When you feel lonely, hurt, or abandoned, remember God is with you. His gift of His Son proves His never-ending care for your soul. The same God who assured Joshua of His presence and power (Joshua 1:9) assures you the same. The baby in the manger was the delivery of Immanuel.

As you think of Jesus today, place Him in your heart as other Bible verses affirm Immanuel. Spend some time in God's Word with reminders of His presence in your daily steps. Here are some to guide your journey…

Isaiah 41:10
Zephaniah 3:17
Romans 8:38-39
Psalm 23:4
John 14:16-17
Deuteronomy 31:8
Psalm 73:26

Today, worship Immanuel. He is the assurance God is with you. He is your remedy to loneliness this Advent season. You are not alone this Christmas.



15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all
creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, in heaven and
on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions
or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him
and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things
hold together. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church. He
is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything
He might be preeminent. 19 For in Him all the fullness of God was
pleased to dwell, 20 and through Him to reconcile to himself all
things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace
by the blood of His cross.

Colossians 1:15-20

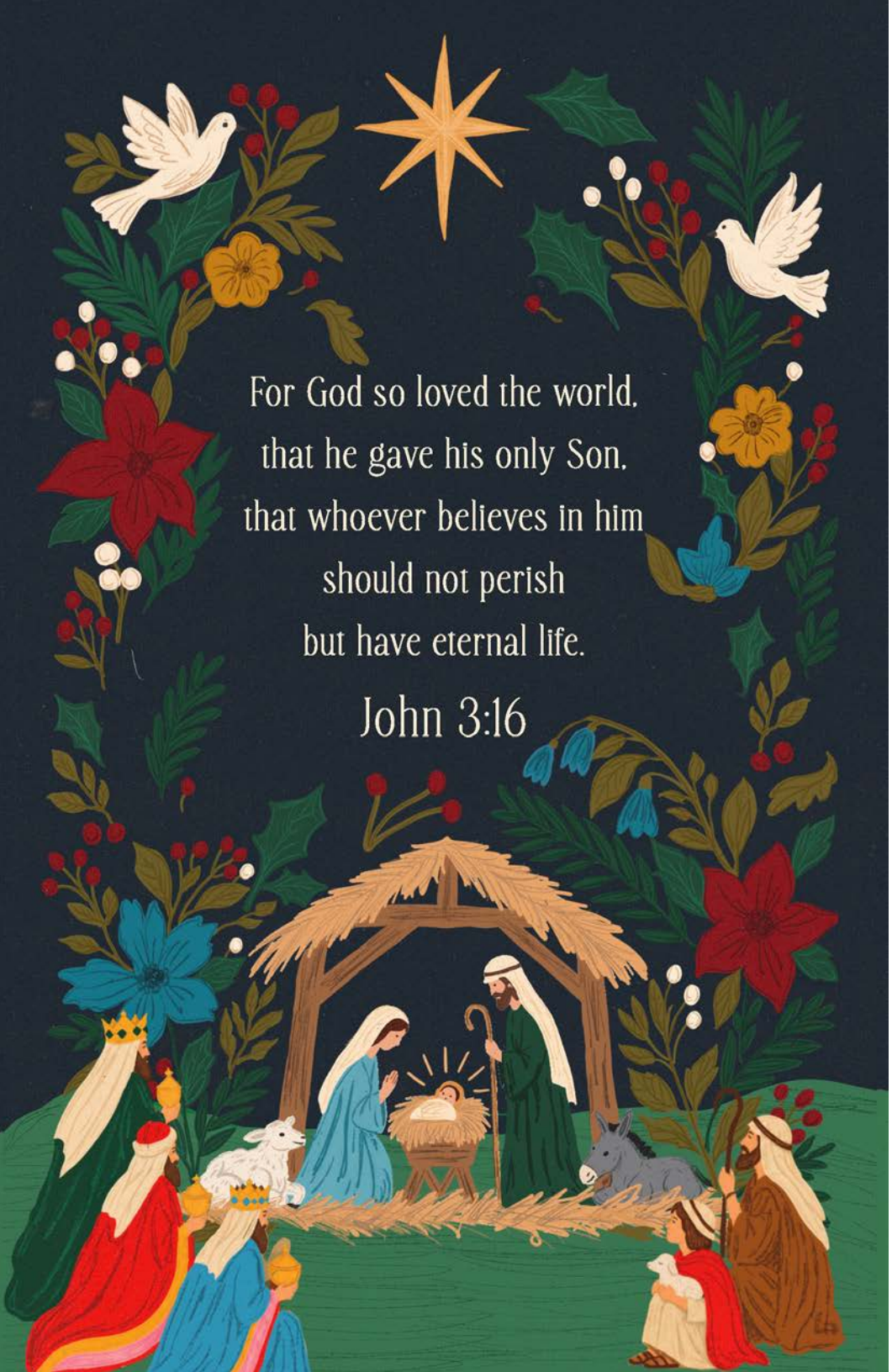
December 24
The Baby Is The Victor

We are just one day away from Christmas. This is usually the last-second day of preparation for tomorrow's festivities. People may rush to wrap last-minute gifts and put the final touches on food prep. The music will get a little louder, and children will run around like Roman candles ready to explode. Yes, today is a glorious day. As we prepare for tomorrow, we must see Jesus as the Victor today. He came on a rescue mission, sent by the Father and equipped by the Holy Spirit, to redeem us from the curse of sin. See the victorious authority of Jesus in today's passage.

Jesus wins. As we look at so many wrongs in this world, we must hold fast to His victory. He is triumphant over all in this world. Nothing in your life can shake His power or His grip on your heart. The baby in the manger needed Mary and Joseph to survive day to day. Yet, they, along with the world, needed Him for eternal life. Rejoice in the victory! "Joy to the World" would be a fitting hymn today, celebrating the arrival of victory. Jesus, the incarnation, is our life. What a gift!

Paul David Tripp writes, "So tomorrow, when you celebrate Christmas Day, remember to celebrate the birth of the Great Warrior. He won the victory you and I could never have won. That victory is our hope in this life and in the one to come" *(Paul David Tripp, Come Let Us Adore Him, p.119)*. You can face the day after Christmas and the beginning of a new year soon, because Jesus wins.

Pray that your heart will gaze on the promised victory born in a manger. Jesus is the Victor. Sin has no hold on you or defeats you. Look to Jesus today and trust His power to overcome the battles you face.



December 25
The Greatest Gift Ever Received

Merry Christmas! Today, people around the world will open several gifts in living rooms. Some gifts will be cherished while some may need to be returned tomorrow. Nonetheless, it is a day of celebration! The Savior was born! As you open gifts, drink gallons of coffee, and eat tons of "healthy" holiday treats, make sure you delight in the greatest gift ever received. David Jeremiah writes, "All the Christmas presents in the world are worth nothing without the presence of Christ." His Name is Jesus, and today must be all about HIM. Read John 3:16-17.

God laid out the greatest gift in one of the Bible's most familiar passages. He demonstrated His love by giving His Son (Romans 5:8, Ephesians 2:8-9). Regardless of what you open or don't open today, you have the gift of Jesus. When you place your faith and trust in Jesus to save you from your sins, you are given the greatest gift of all: eternal forgiveness and life.

The gift takes your sins and casts them as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). The gift reminds you of a better home awaiting you in glory (John 14:1-6). The gift is your ultimate identity when you feel neglected or rejected (2 Corinthians 5:17). The gift guides your mind to much better thoughts (Colossians 3:1-4). The gift guards your joy on this earth (Hebrews 12:2). He has come! Rejoice!

Today, share Jesus' story with someone. Offer to them the greatest gift they can receive today. His gift is for everyone to hear.



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