

The image depicts three camels and their riders in silhouette, traveling across a desert landscape at night. They are following a bright, multi-pointed star (the Star of Bethlehem) that shines from the top center of the frame. The sky is a vibrant, colorful gradient of blue, green, and purple, filled with numerous small white stars. The ground is dark, with the silhouettes of the camels and riders clearly visible against the bright background. The overall mood is one of awe and spiritual journey.

Come, Let Us
Adore Him



DEVOTIONS
Advent 2024

As an added feature, these devotions have reflection questions for each day's message. These can be used for self-study or as prompts for discussion when reflecting as a group.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, occupying the central portion of the page. It is intended for reflection questions as mentioned in the text above.

*Advent Devotions were written by Dr. Kari Vo.
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HE CAME

TEXT: *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. In Him was life ... 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. (John 1:1-4a, 14)*

I love how John begins his Gospel—first the great cosmic sweep of “in the beginning,” with the One God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who has always been and always will be. This is the God who made heaven and earth, and all things in them, including us. How could we possibly know this great and awesome God, or begin to understand Him?

He “became flesh, and dwelt among us.” How could this be? God the Son, the very Word of God, took on human nature, and was born among us, like any human baby. Because He loved us, He came into the world to live among us, full of grace and truth. And we know Him by the intimate Name of Jesus—“God is our Savior.”

Who could ever dream of a God who would give His own life for the people He made, to redeem them from evil? But Jesus did. And then He rose from the dead, never to die again—and He shares that everlasting life with everyone who trusts in Him.

During this Advent season, let’s prepare to celebrate the birth of the One who loves us. Come, let us adore Him.

WE PRAY: *Dear Lord, we love You. Thank You for coming to us. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Have you ever heard of a God like this in any other religion, who served His own people?
- What would lead Him to do that?
- What do you think He’s doing for you now?

ORDINARY

TEXT: *The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham ... the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, ... and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. (Matthew 1:1, 13b, 15-16)*

Have you ever noticed the way Jesus' ancestors take a deep dive underground, so to speak, right after they return from exile in Babylon? Before that, you can track them through history, down the line of Judean rulers. But after that, nothing. A string of names, but no clue about where they lived, or what they did for a living. Silence—until Mary and Joseph.

Why? I wonder. God seems to have been intent on making Jesus' earthly life as ordinary as possible. Joseph worked as a carpenter. Mary came from a small town. They had no special status to make things easier for them when Jesus was born away from home; they were obeying a government census called by a far-away emperor who never knew Jesus existed.

I'm glad Jesus was born to such an ordinary family. It makes it that much easier to believe that He can love—and save—people like us, ordinary sinners, who have nothing special about us that could make us worthy of God's attention. When Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead to save us, He did it for us—ordinary people who needed Him so much.

WE PRAY: *Thank You, Lord Jesus, for caring about us and coming to us. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Would you consider your family ordinary or not? Why?
- Would it be easier or harder for Jesus to carry on His ministry if He were upper class?
- What about His death on the cross?

HIDDEN POWER

TEXT: *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. (Luke 1:5-7)*

Luke starts his story with two people: Herod the king and Zechariah the priest. You could hardly get a stronger contrast—Herod may have been a genius in many ways, but he was also paranoid, dangerous, and a murderer of his own family. Zechariah, on the other hand, is called “righteous” and “blameless,” along with his wife.

Which was more powerful? At first glance we’d all say “Herod.” After all, he was a king, with the power of life and death in his hands. But Elizabeth and Zechariah have a different kind of power—God’s power, not their own, working to bring life to the whole world. God used this humble elderly couple to produce the baby who would grow up to be John the Baptist. And John prepared the way for our Lord Jesus, our Savior, who died and rose again so that everyone who trusts in Him would live forever.

WE PRAY: *Lord, thank You that You choose the humble to show Your saving power. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Do you think Elizabeth and Zechariah considered themselves important or powerful?
- Why do you think God chose them to be John’s parents?
- Are you too unimportant for God to use? Why do you think so?

READY OR NOT

TEXT: *Now while he 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 ...” (Luke 1:8-13)*

I’ve often wondered whether, in his heart of hearts, Zechariah still wanted his prayer to be heard. Because it’s one thing to ask for a baby when you’re still young and strong enough to cope with him; it’s another thing altogether to face sleepless nights and years of diapers when you are already old enough to have grandchildren!

But whether he still meant it or not, God meant it. And He meant it for good—for this baby, come so late in his parents’ life, came into the world at exactly the right time to get the people ready for Jesus, our Savior. Ready or not, these two believers were caught up in God’s plan—and to their endless benefit, as God made the world ready for Jesus, our Savior, who would rescue us from the power of evil through His life, death, and resurrection.

WE PRAY: *Lord, help me to trust You, even when I think I’m not ready for what You’re doing. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Are there any prayers you have prayed that you would be taken aback to have answered now?
- Why does God so often choose the people you’d least expect to do His work?
- When events in your life make you nervous? How do you find help in God?

PROMISES

TEXT: *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 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.” (Luke 1:13-17)*

However shocked Zechariah was, at least he was listening well enough to be able to report what the angel said later. And those promises must have been a comfort to John’s parents as they waited for his birth, and then during the long years of raising a son. It was a dark time for their country; they were occupied by Rome, and the local leader, King Herod, was dangerous and unpredictable. But in their home they had the promise of God, a child who would make ready the way for God’s Messiah—Jesus the Christ.

And we hold tight to God’s promises too, no matter what is happening in the world around us. We hold on to Jesus in faith, knowing that everyone who trusts in Him will live forever as part of God’s own family. We rest in the knowledge that Jesus has given Himself into death for our sake—and has risen from the dead, never to die again. Because He lives, so will we.

WE PRAY: *Lord, when I’m worried, let me rest in You. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- What are you most concerned about right now?
- What strength and comfort do you find in God’s promises?
- How does Jesus give you hope for your future?

OOPS!

TEXT: *And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? 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.” (Luke 1:18-20)*

Zechariah made a big mistake. Not only did he fail to trust God’s message, but he overlooked the fact that it was an actual real angel talking to him. I mean, what greater sign could you possibly want?

Nevertheless, he got one—for the miraculous sign he demanded was that he would be mute for the next nine months. I wonder how often he regretted his hasty words?

Thanks be to God! God is forgiving and kind—and He has a sense of humor. Zechariah’s mistake made no difference to God’s mercy. He still sent John, to the great joy of Elizabeth—and the more silent joy of her husband. And six months later He sent Jesus, our long-awaited Savior—whose life, death, and resurrection would bring us back to our patient, loving God in joy and peace.

WE PRAY: *Dear Father, when I mess up, forgive me and straighten me out. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Do you think Zechariah’s punishment fitted his crime?
- Do you think Gabriel had ever met with that kind of disbelief before, in all his service to God?
- What about you? Would you have disbelieved like Zechariah, or trusted like Mary?

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

TEXT: *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." (Luke 1:21-35)*

I wonder what Elizabeth's reaction was when she finally learned Zechariah's story. Perhaps he wrote it down for her? At least we know how she felt about God's promise—overjoyed and relieved, because in that time childlessness was usually blamed on the woman.

And so she took five months to stay close to home, in seclusion—and probably in silence most of the time, since her husband couldn't speak. What did she do with that time—pray? Think? Dream about the future?

Surely she thanked God for her baby, who would prepare the way for the Messiah, Jesus. And I expect she spent a lot of time thinking about that coming Messiah—for the Old Testament was filled with promises about what Jesus would do. He would rescue everyone suffering under the power of sin, death, and the devil, laying down His own life to set us free—and then rising again.

WE PRAY: *Lord Jesus, as we look back on Your great work, thank You for loving us. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Do you take time to pray and think quietly in God's presence?
- What kinds of things do you focus on in prayer?
- What specific things are you thankful for about Jesus?

SURPRISE!

TEXT: *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!" (Luke 1:26-28)*

What a shock that must have been for Mary. There she was, probably doing the family chores—carrying water or feeding the chickens—when an angel showed up out of nowhere. And he called her “favored” and said, “The Lord is with you!” No wonder she was taken aback. What could he possibly want?

She found out soon enough. God was breaking into her little world, and He was honoring her with a special task that would rearrange her life forever. God is like that, sometimes.

God does that to us, too, when we're least expecting it. A sudden turn of events—a surprise medical diagnosis, a new job, a change in our family—and suddenly we're serving God in a way we never expected. And that can be scary. We feel unprepared.

What better can we do than to lean on Jesus for help? He who lived and suffered and died and rose for our sakes, because He loved us—He will surely help us now.

WE PRAY: *Lord, You know what I'm facing. Help me through it. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- When have you been caught unprepared by some event in your life?
- How did that change the way you serve God and God's people?
- How do you find strength and comfort in Jesus when your life changes?

FAVOR WITH GOD

TEXT: *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.” (Luke 1:29-33)*

The angel said, “Don’t be afraid, for you have found favor with God.” Mary would need that comfort—because God was laying on her one of the hardest tasks any woman could do, becoming mother to Jesus.

Even then, Mary must have known something of how difficult it would be. Her Son would be the Messiah, the promised King—and there is no king who lives an easy life, without opposition. She may not have foreseen His ministry, the hardship, the suffering, the cross—but she knew there would be suffering. But God’s grace, God’s favor, would uphold her.

God’s grace and favor uphold us too, as we trust in Jesus and serve Him in our lives. We know there will be suffering—what life avoids it?—but we have Jesus, our Savior, who upholds us and keeps us every day of our lives. How could we not trust Him, when He loved us enough to die for us—and to rise again?

WE PRAY: *Lord, when I am afraid, let me trust in You. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Was Mary the kind of person you’d expect God to choose for the mother of the Messiah?
- Explain your reasoning.
- Jesus has chosen you to be His own through faith. Does that surprise you? Why or why not?

DEALING WITH THE DETAILS

TEXT: *And Mary said to the angel, “How will this 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.” 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. (Luke 1:34-38)*

Like Zechariah, Mary has questions. But she’s not doubting God. What she wants to know is, how is this going to happen? She is a virgin—is she supposed to move the wedding up, or what?

The angel honors that practical, trusting question. And so he explains that the Holy Spirit will bring about Jesus’ conception. She need not do anything at all, but just trust in God. And Mary agrees to that.

What a wonderful God we have, who knows our difficulties and our limitations, and makes a way for His plans to happen in spite of them! Jesus gave His own life on the cross to bring us into God’s family; and now that He has risen again, He works through us to carry out His mission and bring as many people as possible to faith in Him. Our weakness is no problem for Him.

WE PRAY: *Lord, use me in my weakness to do Your work. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Do you think Mary was nervous?
- When have you found yourself serving God in spite of your weakness?
- If you are nervous about the challenge, where can you find help?

PLACE OF REFUGE

TEXT: *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? ... And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." (Luke 1:39-43, 45)*

I am so happy that God took such gentle care of Mary, to prepare a safe place for her to spend her first three months carrying Jesus! For she would need a refuge away from prying eyes that might notice morning sickness and other signs of pregnancy. Elizabeth was already carrying a miracle baby—she would surely believe Mary's story and welcome her into her home, to rejoice together. And so the angel planted that idea in Mary's mind, because God is gracious.

God is gracious to us, too, when we are going through some difficult time. He knows our weakness, and we can always pray for His help and wisdom. And He has become our place of refuge, the safe Rock in which we can hide when things are too much. He Himself became our safety when He laid down His life on the cross for us—and took it up again on Easter morning.

WE PRAY: *When I am afraid, Lord, be my hiding place. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Why do you think Mary's family was willing to let her go to Elizabeth?
- What benefit did Elizabeth get from Mary's company?
- When has Jesus provided a safe place (or person!) for you?

CHOSEN AND BLESSED

TEXT: *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 helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.” (Luke 1:46-50, 54-55)*

Mary sang for joy when Elizabeth greeted her and confirmed everything the angel had told her. Who wouldn't sing? She was carrying the Messiah, Jesus, our Savior. All of God's wonderful promises were about to come true. And she herself would play a role in it, humble though she was. How could she stop from singing?

If you believe in Jesus, God has looked on you as well. He has chosen you Himself and given you to His Son Jesus, as He says: that He might “give eternal life to all” (John 17:2b). Because Jesus gave His life for you, you are a part of God's family, one of His own children; and because Jesus has risen from the dead, He continues to carry out His work in the world—partly through you. You have the amazing privilege of serving Jesus through your words and actions, representing Him to those around you—your family, your friends, your neighbors—even your enemies! Like Mary, you play a role in God's good work—and you are blessed.

WE PRAY: *Lord, thank You for choosing me and blessing me with a way to serve in Your mission. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- What do you do when you are happiest and want to express your joy!
- Does it surprise you to know that God the Father chose you for Jesus?
- In what ways, big or small, do you serve Jesus in your life?

FACING THE FUTURE

TEXT: *And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home. (Luke 1:56)*

It was a good three months for Mary and Elizabeth. No doubt they prayed together, worked together, sang together. But at last the day came when Mary had to go home and face the music.

What would her parents say, when they learned she was pregnant? What would Joseph say? Neither of them knew. But they put their trust in God, and Mary set off for home. God would have to deal with whatever came next.

And He did. And He will do the same for us when we're facing a scary future and don't know what to do next. That's when we turn to the God who loves us with all His heart, and we cry out: "Lord, help me!" Be with me and help me with whatever happens. Keep me in Your care. Help me to trust Your love.

Because deep in our hearts, we know we can trust Him. The God who came into our world as a human being like us, to suffer and die and to rise again, all to rescue us—He knows our need. And He will never forsake us.

WE PRAY: *Lord, when I'm afraid, help me and be with me! Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- What do you worry about in your future?
- Take a minute to pray and ask God to help you with it.
- Why does it help to know God won't leave you all alone to deal with it?

NOT “LESS THAN”

TEXT: *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. (Luke 1:57-58)*

I'm so glad that Elizabeth's neighbors and relatives came together to celebrate with her. That kind of happiness is one of the many things you miss when you cannot have children and you want them desperately. Every month seems to bring another baby shower, another birth—but not for you. And you grieve.

This was my case for many years. It may be yours right now. If it is, I am sorry. May God bless you and give you comfort and strength. And as always, may you take comfort in the Son of God who came into this world to seek and find you, you yourself—because He loves you and wants you as His own. You are not “less than.” You are Jesus' own.

WE PRAY: *Lord, have mercy on those who grieve, and bless those who care for them. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Childlessness is just one grief people deal with. What are others?
- How can you show love to people in pain?
- If you are in pain or grieving, where can you find help?

WHY NAME HIM THAT?

TEXT: *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. (Luke 1:59-62)*

Don't people drive you crazy sometimes? Elizabeth told them what the baby's name was, but that wasn't good enough; they tried to go over her head by asking Zechariah. Surely he would set his wife straight!

I imagine they were deeply disappointed when Zechariah took the tablet and wrote, "His name is John." Why that name?

John means "God is gracious," and that was surely a good name for a miracle baby given by a gracious Lord. But it's even better in this case, because John came into this world to prepare the way for Jesus, our gracious Lord Himself! Because God is gracious, Jesus became our Savior, living and dying and rising again for us. Now we who trust in Him are forgiven, accepted by God, and made new.

WE PRAY: *Gracious Lord, thank You for coming to save us. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Do you ever get into conflict with your relatives or neighbors?
- What does it mean to be gracious?
- Tell about a time when God has been gracious to you.

BACK IN GOD'S SERVICE

TEXT: *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. (Luke 1:63-64)*

At least one good thing came out of the community fuss over the baby's name; Zechariah had a second chance to respond to God's good gift, this time in public. And he got it right this time.

Zechariah was no fool; he had had nine months to think about the error of his ways. It must have done his heart good to see his wife's joy when she became pregnant, and to listen to Mary and Elizabeth talking and singing together before God. And so now, when the community asks for his decision, he gets it right: with joy and faith he writes on that tablet, "His name is John."

What a gift God gave to Zechariah—and what a gift He gives to us, when we mess up and repent! God wipes out the sin and shame of Zechariah's past—it will never be held against him. But then God does more than that—he brings Zechariah right back into His service, using Him to name John and to prophesy the coming of Jesus, our Savior.

When we sin, it matters. But Jesus came into our world to seek us out and bring us back to Himself, forgiven and made new again. That's what He was doing through His death and resurrection. And now that we are at peace with God through Jesus, we too can serve Him with joy.

WE PRAY: *Lord, show me what You want me to do for You. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Does God ever hold our past sins against us?
- How do you know?
- How do you serve God every day? Be as specific as you can.

WITHOUT FEAR

TEXT: *And his 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 ... 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 ... that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.” (Luke 1:67-68, 71-72a, 75)*

Fear is a problem in my life. Sometimes it's fear of the future—what will happen tomorrow? Sometimes it's fear of people—will that person harm me or betray me?

God knows the power that fear has in our lives, and He came to save us. That is why Zechariah sings about Jesus: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people ... that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us.” Only Jesus is strong enough to save us from the power of evil. Only He loves us enough to lay down His own life to rescue us from sin, death, and the devil. Only He, who rose from the dead, is sharing with us even now His own everlasting life—so we can walk through this world trusting in Him every day, until we meet Him face to face.

WE PRAY: *When I'm afraid, dear Lord, be with me and help me! Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- What are you afraid of?
- Did Jesus experience fear? How did He overcome it?
- When you are afraid, how do you find help in Jesus?

SUNRISE

TEXT: *[Zechariah said] “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.” (Luke 1:76-79)*

Have you ever gone through a terrible night—in the emergency room, perhaps, or lying awake all night after the death of someone you loved? The night seems endless, and your thoughts only add to the torment. You can't sleep. And then, finally, the sunrise comes.

This is what Jesus is for us, in Zechariah's lovely poetry. There are times we feel lost, cut off from God, without peace and without hope in our lives. But then, unexpectedly, God Himself comes into our darkness—not roughly, but gently; not causing fear, but bringing tenderness, mercy, and peace. Jesus comes to us as a human baby—and who could be afraid of a baby? And He brings with Him the promise of forgiveness and life, through His death and resurrection. Jesus is our Light, and He will never leave us alone in the dark again.

WE PRAY: *Lord, let me have Your light always. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- When you were a child, were you afraid of the dark?
- Why is “sunrise” a good name for Jesus?
- How does Jesus help you during dark times?

IN THE WILDERNESS

TEXT: *And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel. (Luke 1:80)*

Luke tells us that John lived in the wilderness before he began his public ministry, getting people ready for Jesus Himself. I wonder why?

By birth John was a priest, like his father Zechariah. Even if his parents died when John was fairly young, I would have expected another relative to raise him and see to it that he found his place in the temple, serving just as his father did.

But that doesn't seem to have happened. Instead, he became "the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord'" (Matthew 3:3b).

Sometimes it takes a voice from the wilderness to shake us out of our usual ways of looking at the world. And clearly, God didn't send John to follow in the same paths everyone else had trod for years and years. No, it was his job to shake up his hearers, getting them ready for the coming of God Himself—Jesus, our Savior. John prepared His way—and Jesus came to us, to forgive us and to save us and to make us His own. Through His birth, life, death, and resurrection, Jesus brought us up out from the wilderness into the promised land of God's own kingdom.

WE PRAY: *Lord, thank You for bringing me to Yourself. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Do you prefer wilderness or cities? Why?
- What other events in the Bible do you know about that happened in the wilderness?
- Why do you think God chose for Jesus Himself to grow up in a small village, neither wilderness nor city?

AN ORDINARY SHAME

TEXT: *Now the birth of Jesus Christ 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. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. (Matthew 1:18-19)*

It amazes me that God chose to send His Son into the world through such a common, embarrassing scene. A young girl turns out to be pregnant out of wedlock; her friends and family are upset, and her future is in danger. Such an ordinary shame, it seemed—and one that most of the world still thinks was the result of sin, more than 2,000 years later. And Jesus knew it would be so, when He chose this birth before the foundation of the world, in the council of the Trinity.

It didn't have to be this way; Jesus could have been born to a virgin princess locked in a tower, whose chastity could never be questioned—or to a modern girl with DNA proof. God chose this instead. Why share our shame from the beginning? Perhaps because Jesus came to rescue us from all sin and shame—and how better than to start from the beginning?

This is the love that Jesus has for us—that He came to be with us in our broken lives, and to take away our shame forever, through His death and resurrection. Because we belong to Him, we need never worry about how God looks at us. Jesus is our peace and forgiveness forever.

WE PRAY: *Lord, thank You for coming to me, just as I am. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Why does Jesus care so little about His reputation?
- Name another time when you see Him showing love and not caring about the shame it brings to Him.
- How do you feel about Him, to know He cares that much for you?

TWO FATHERS

TEXT: *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. She will bear a Son, and you shall call His Name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”*
(Matthew 1:20-21)

It’s interesting that God holds off on explaining anything to Joseph until Joseph has a chance to think it through, probably pray, and make the best decision he can. I mean, God could have said something weeks or months earlier, before Jesus was even conceived—the way He did for Mary. But not this time—not to Joseph.

It seems unfair. Why put him through such a test of faith? And yet, look at how marvelously he comes through! Joseph makes the kindest plan he can think of to deal with the situation—and discovers that God has a different plan. And instead of complaining when God completely rearranges his marriage and family, Joseph simply gets on with it—protecting and caring for the unborn Jesus and His mother Mary.

This makes me happy—to see God the Father trusting His own dear Son Jesus to a human man to take care of; and to see that man taking up the job with such loving care and quiet kindness. No wonder the Son of both fathers is just the same—looking after our welfare with patient love and mercy, even at the cost of His own life.

WE PRAY: *Lord Jesus, make Your lovingkindness shine through me, too. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Have you ever had to deal with a messy situation as best you could?
- How did you decide what to do? Where did you find wisdom?
- When has God used someone else to care for you?

GOD'S CHOICE

TEXT: *When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a Son. And he called His Name Jesus. (Matthew 1:24-25)*

Jesus suffered a great deal in His life; but there is one area in which God made sure He had the very best, and that was in His earthly parents. Look at Joseph! He, as much as Mary, was God's choice to serve as a parent to His Son. And we can see why when we look at his patience, his love, and his faith.

I'm not sure I could have believed in a dream that told me my fiancée was guiltless, however miraculous it seemed. But Joseph not only believes, he gets up and does exactly what God tells him to do; he brings Mary home as his wife, shielding her and the baby from shame—even though he must have known the whole village would take this as a confession that he himself had jumped the gun and gotten her pregnant before the marriage was finalized.

Why does Joseph do this? Because he loves Mary—and her baby—in spite of everything; and he was willing to lay down his life for them, to keep them safe. Like father, like Son, don't you think? Jesus showed that same love to all of us when He carried our sin and shame to the cross, protecting us at the cost of His own life. Because He suffered, died, and rose again, we are safe in Jesus' family forever.

WE PRAY: *Dear Jesus, thank You for loving us and making us safe. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Did anyone ever say you resembled one of your family? If so, how?
- Who is someone who made sacrifices, big or small, to help you?
- Why did God choose Himself to be our Savior, and not an angel or ordinary human?

KING OF KINGS

TEXT: *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. (Luke 2:1-5)*

How strange it seems! The Emperor Augustus spoke, and the wheels of government started turning. And so a small family had their first baby far from home, in Bethlehem—a baby who was the Son of God.

Jesus would be a very different ruler than Augustus—a King who lived among the poor, a refugee for some years, and homeless Himself as an adult. He served people rather than being served—patient years of teaching, healing, listening, and forgiving. And when the time was right, He lay down His life to save His people. And His crown was of thorns, and His throne was a cross.

But that wasn't the end—for Jesus broke the power of death, not only for Himself but for all of us as well—for everyone who trusts in Him. Augustus died without ever knowing about the greatest thing that happened during his long years in power. But we know—because God made sure that this good news went out into all the world. We have a King who loves us, and we who trust in Him will live with Him in His kingdom forever.

WE PRAY: *Father, thank You for giving us Jesus as our loving King! Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- What do you think of when someone says “king”?
- How does Jesus fit that picture? How does He differ from it?
- Would you rather have been Augustus, or one of the Christmas shepherds? Why?

A HARD BIRTH

TEXT: *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. (Luke 2:6-7)*

A strange town full of people. Labor pains, and a search for a place to lie down—somewhere, anywhere, as long as it was safe and private. A midwife Mary had never seen before, to help her through her first labor. A baby's cry. And then the swaddling clothes she had packed so carefully in faraway Nazareth—and a manger full of straw, to keep Jesus warm and safely off the floor.

Did Mary wonder why God chose such a birth for His Son?

She may have. We wonder, looking back at it. Jesus wasn't going to have anything easy in His life—not even His birth. And in the years to come, He would be a refugee—a homeless teacher and healer—a Man betrayed by a friend—the crucified Son of God, dying naked on a cross for the people He loved so dearly.

We see Jesus' glory even more clearly for the darkness that surrounds Him. This is love—the God who became a human baby for us, who suffered for us, who rose from the dead to give us everlasting life. This is love, shining into our own darkness to give us joy and salvation.

WE PRAY: *Jesus, You are my light and my salvation. Keep me always in Your hands. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- What do you know about your own birth, if anything?
- Why do you think God deliberately chose such a hard human life for Himself?
- How do you see Jesus' love for you in the birth He chose?

BORN TO YOU

TEXT: *And ... 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." (Luke 2:8-12)*

I love that God sent angels to visit the shepherds, so that they were the first to hear about the newborn Savior. Surely they must have wondered, in the years to come: Why would God choose them, of all people? They were poor and humble. Why choose the shepherds?

Maybe because Jesus is our true Good Shepherd, the One who has come to gather God's scattered people and bring them back to safety. Maybe because Jesus is the Lamb of God, who gives His life for us, so that we can have peace with God. Maybe just because these shepherds were the only ones awake and ready to hear the good news—that God had sent all of us a Savior, born to us—us personally—and so they should come to adore Him!

And now God says that to us: "Unto YOU is born a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Not unto someone else. Unto you—and me, and all of us, broken and sinful as we are. Jesus has come to save us, and we are happy.

WE PRAY: *Thank You, Father, for Your Son. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Do you usually expect good news at night, or bad?
- Why do you think God sent angels and not ordinary people?
- If Jesus is born to you, that means He is yours. How do you feel about that?

BROTHERLY LOVE

TEXT: *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!” (Luke 2:13-14)*

I love the joy that the angels show, praising God and celebrating, a multitude of them at once! They can hardly wait to join the celebration. Jesus is born! The Savior is come! God is bringing the human race back to Himself in peace.

I consider that very brotherly of them, if I can use the word, because surely we human beings are the main beneficiaries of Jesus’ birth that night! And yet the angels cannot contain their joy. They show the hallmarks of God’s kingdom, a love for God and for all His creatures, even those different from them—even those who have fallen into sin and need forgiving. And now that they see Jesus, the Son of God, starting His work as Savior, they are overjoyed for us.

We, too, have a share in that love, whenever we tell people about Jesus who have not heard the good news before: How God came into our world to rescue us from the power of sin, death, and the devil. How He grew up to serve as a teacher and healer, and to let Himself be betrayed, arrested, and crucified for our sake. How His death broke the power of evil over the whole human race, and how He rose from the dead, and shares that victory over death with all of us—everyone who will believe in Him. When we tell our brothers and sisters that story, we have the same privilege as the angels—we serve as God’s messengers.

WE PRAY: *Lord, make me a messenger of Your good news to those who need to hear it! Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Who told you about Jesus?
- Have you ever told anyone about Jesus?
- How did you feel about that occasion, if so?

“THE LORD IS SALVATION”

TEXT: *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. (Luke 2:21)*

There are a lot of names God could have chosen for Jesus. So many Hebrew names are statements about God—“God is righteousness,” for example, or “God is my healer.” But God picked none of those when He chose the name He would carry as a human being in our broken world. He chose the most obvious one, “the Lord is salvation,” because that’s exactly what He came to do. Jesus was born to become our Savior—to rescue us from evil, to forgive our sins, and to make us children of God. Nobody else could do this for us—only Jesus, God with us.

It comforts me that God chose the obvious name. It tells me Jesus was clear about what He was going to do for us even before His conception! He came to be born as one of us, to live and to serve and to care for us, and ultimately to lay down His life for us on the cross. By dying He destroyed the power of death over us; and by rising to life again on the third day, He gave life to everyone who trusts in Him. Jesus Himself tells us so: “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me. ... For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:38, 40).

WE PRAY: *Lord Jesus, keep me as Your own forever. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Do you know what your own name means?
- When are you most clear that you need a Savior?
- Why did God come Himself, instead of sending someone else?

LAMB OF GOD

TEXT: *And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” (Luke 2:22-24)*

When Jesus was forty days old, His family went to Jerusalem, several miles from Bethlehem, to do what God’s law commanded. Jesus Himself would have been presented before the Lord, and an offering made for Him as a firstborn Son. Mary had to make an offering too, which normally would have been a lamb—but it looks like the family couldn’t afford it, so they offered a pair of birds instead (see Leviticus 12:8).

How strange it seems, that the family of God’s own Son couldn’t afford the usual offering in God’s temple! But in another way, it sounds right—for Mary and Joseph did bring a lamb, after all. They brought Jesus Himself, the Lamb of God, who would offer Himself as a sacrifice on behalf of the entire human family one day. Through His death He would redeem all of us; and through His resurrection He would become the Source of life for all of us who trust in Him.

WE PRAY: *Lord, thank You for making Yourself an offering for me, so I could be Yours forever. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- What customs do your people follow when a baby is born?
- What kinds of offerings do you make when you worship—money? objects? acts of service?
- What does it mean to you, to realize that Jesus’ family had financial problems?

PROMISES

TEXT: *Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the Law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God (Luke 2:25-28)*

How wonderful to have a promise from God that you would live to see His Son Jesus born into the world—the Savior that you'd been expecting all your life! How amazing to be able to hold Jesus in your arms—to carry the One who made heaven and earth, and you yourself as well! No wonder Simeon was overwhelmed.

Like Simeon, we too have wonderful promises to look forward to. See what Jesus has said to us! He says, "I am the Bread of Life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35b). "Whoever comes to Me I will never cast out" (John 6:37b). "I am the Good Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me, just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. ... I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:14-15, 28). "I am the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live" (John 11:25b).

WE PRAY: *Lord Jesus, let me trust Your promises with all my heart. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- How trustworthy is Jesus?
- Which of His many promises means the most to you?
- Why?

FEAR

TEXT: *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, 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." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him ... (Matthew 2:1-3)*

I'm not surprised all Jerusalem was troubled. Herod was a dangerous man to live with, a murderer of his own family—someone who should never have been put in charge of a chicken coop, let alone a country full of vulnerable human beings. Living with Herod meant living on the edge all the time—when he was angry, nobody was safe. And so Jerusalem was full of fear.

There are other people like Herod even today—parents, bosses, spouses who are abusive. And some of us live with them, and worry every day about their moods.

If you are in a situation like this, please know it's not what God wants for you. God loves you deeply—enough to die and to rise again for you!—and He wants you to live in safety, with the love and protection every human being should have. Ask Him for help, and for wisdom to find a way out. And seek people you trust to help you out of your situation. You didn't cause your abuse, and you don't deserve it. God wants you to be safe, and whole, and free.

WE PRAY: *Lord, please help those who live with abuse, and rescue them. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- What harm does abuse do to the person who suffers it?
- What harm does it do to the abuser him- or herself?
- How can you help someone trying to escape a bad situation?

SEEING JESUS CORRECTLY

TEXT: *And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. 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." (Matthew 2:4-5, 7-8)*

It's a twisted kind of faith Herod has in this passage! He seems to believe in the promised Messiah enough to call in the priests and demand to know where the Bible said Jesus would be born. But he doesn't have enough faith to welcome Jesus as the God-sent blessing He really is—all he can see is someone who might take away his throne.

And yet, don't I do the same thing sometimes?—looking at Jesus as someone who's going to ruin my (sinful!) fun, and not as the gracious, loving Savior He really is. Keeping my distance so I can pretend I don't hear Him!

But that's ridiculous. This is the Lord who loved me so much He lay down His life for me, to set me free from evil—and who rose from the dead to give me life forever. He's not seeking His own good—He's seeking mine. And so I know that, if I allow Him to pull me close to Him, I'll be glad I did in the end.

WE PRAY: *Lord, help me to see You for what You really are—the best blessing I've ever had. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- What should Herod have done, once he figured out that the Messiah had been born?
- Do you think the wise men believed Herod when he said he was planning to worship Jesus?
- Ask the Lord to draw you closer to Him.

GIFTS

TEXT: *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. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the Child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. (Matthew 2:9-11)*

It's such a lovely picture—the wise men kneeling before little Jesus, offering Him their presents. I wonder what He thought of them? I suspect Mary took the spices away pretty quickly—a toddler could make a huge mess with those in no time. Gold is less messy—and if it was shaped right, I suppose Jesus might chew on it like a teething ring!

We don't know what ultimately happened to the gifts Jesus got. Maybe they supported the young family when they were refugees in Egypt. But we know what happened to the gifts Jesus *brought*—because those are all the good things He came into this world to give us.

Think of what He gave to us through His life, death, and resurrection: forgiveness, joy, and peace with God. New, clean, loving hearts and minds. Healing for our brokenness. A life that lasts forever.

But the best of all His gifts is Himself. For God gives Himself to us in Jesus, to be our life forever. We will never be alone or lost again. The One who loves us more than anyone will stay with us forever.

WE PRAY: *Thank You, Lord, for giving us Yourself. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- If you had come with the wise men, what present would you want to offer Jesus?
- What could you give Him now, of your own free choice, to say “I love You”?
- Why is it fair to call Jesus Himself our gift?

SAVING THE SAVIOR

TEXT: *And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. (Matthew 2:12)*

I'm glad God waited till after the wise men saw Jesus to warn them about Herod. It would be a shame to spoil their meeting with Him by letting that evil intrude on it.

And yet, they *were* wise men. They probably had a fair idea already of what was in Herod's heart. But God made sure of Jesus' safety by sending that dream. And so the last gift the wise men gave Jesus was His own safety—as much as that was in their hands to give.

They were keeping their own Savior safe—and did they ever realize that, in their lifetimes? Maybe not. Maybe yes, if some of the early Christians made it to their country 30-some years later, after Jesus had been crucified, died, and rose from the dead. Maybe in old age they heard the story of how the baby they tried to keep safe grew up to save them—bringing them life, joy, and peace with God.

Whether they ever knew that or not, we know it—and we rejoice in it. God came into our world to save us from the power of death and evil. And now He offers love, hope, and salvation to anyone who will take it—to all of us who trust Him.

WE PRAY: *Thank You, Father, for sending us our Savior, Jesus. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Do you think the wise men had doubts about Herod already? Why or why not?
- What kinds of things do you do to keep safe the people you love?
- How far would you go to save them? Why? What does that say to you about Jesus' feelings for you?

TAKING NO CHANCES

TEXT: *Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the Child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the Child, to destroy Him.” And he rose and took the Child and His mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. ... (Matthew 2:13-15a)*

God gives Joseph very specific instructions—where to go, and how long to stay there, and why. God isn’t taking any chances with Jesus’ safety.

Neither is Joseph! As soon as the dream is over, he wakes up the family and gets them on the road to Egypt. He doesn’t wait till morning. Joseph is in charge of the Son of God, our Savior—and he isn’t taking any chances with Him.

That’s a great attitude for any parent—and it’s the same attitude God showed toward us when human beings first fell into the power of sin and death. God knew we couldn’t rescue ourselves. And He loved us.

So God Himself came into our world, born as a Man, to be our Savior. When the time was right, Jesus lay down His life on the cross, to save us and bring us safely back to God’s family. And then He rose from the dead, never to die again. God handled our rescue Himself, from beginning to end. God takes no chances with us—because He loves us.

WE PRAY: *Dear Lord, thank You for Your loving care for us. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- In what situations do you feel free to take a chance? When do you not feel free? Why?
- When have you done something yourself, just to make sure it was done right?
- What does that tell you about God’s choice to come Himself to save you?

REMEMBRANCE

TEXT: *Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. (Matthew 2:16)*

I wonder if Jesus' parents ever told Him the story of all those babies that died in His place? I think they must have. As His parents, they must have wanted to shield Him; but they also knew that God had sent Him into the world with a job to do, and keeping back information wouldn't help Him.

And being a human being like us, he must have felt grief—and horror. He must have been troubled by it, and for more than one reason—because Jesus would share those babies' fate, after 30 years' delay. He knew the cross was coming. And He knew what it would be like.

But He knew one other thing, and that made all the difference. Jesus knew that, by going through with His own suffering and death, He would rescue all of us from the power of evil. Through His resurrection, He would break the power of death over every human being, all of us who trust in Him as our Savior.

And now that Jesus has finished His great work, we have comfort—not just for us, but for all who belong to Him. The babies of Bethlehem will rise again, just as we will, on the day when Jesus returns. And we will rejoice together, adoring Jesus, who gave Himself for all of us. (See Romans 5:12-21.)

WE PRAY: *When grief and horror overtake me, Lord, be with me! Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- How old do you think Jesus was when they told Him this story?
- How do you cope with the horrors in the news every day?
- How do you find help in Jesus when you are facing loss, illness, or even death?

HOME COMING

TEXT: *But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Rise, take the Child and His mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the Child's life are dead." And he rose and took the Child and His mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream ... he went and lived in a city called Nazareth. (Matthew 2:19-22a, 23a)*

I wonder what it was like for Mary and Joseph, returning to Nazareth? They were not the same people they used to be. Mary was now an experienced mother who had seen many wonders and evils during her years away. Joseph, too, had grown, learning to follow God's directions when their lives depended on it.

And now they were home—and who could they tell their stories to? Maybe nobody. Jesus' own safety meant it would be best to keep silent. And so they settled in to life in a small village, sharing the common concerns of parents everywhere. Except that they were raising the Messiah.

They must have felt out of place; and we, too, are out of place, if we belong to Jesus our Savior. Our concerns are different than those of the people around us; we look to Jesus to show us what truly matters and how to live. We do this because we love the Savior who rescued us at the cost of His own suffering, death, and resurrection. We may be strangers in our own towns and even to our families, but because of Jesus, we find our home in God.

WE PRAY: *When I feel out of place, let me trust in You, Father. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- When have you felt out of place?
- Why?
- How can you be sure you belong in God's family?

ENJOYING GOD'S PEACE RIGHT NOW

TEXT: ... *They returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the Child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon Him. (Luke 2:39b-40)*

There must have been many times Mary sat, watching Jesus as He played, and wondering about His future. There must have been long days in the carpenter's shop where Joseph, showing His Son how to shape a yoke or sand a table, thought about the work Jesus would do in the future. He was going to save God's people from their sins—so the angel said; but how? Some of the prophecies were very troubling.

But now, all was peace. Jesus was growing, and the family had a decent life in Nazareth. They traveled to Jerusalem on the feasts, as God commanded; but that was about as much excitement as they ever got. And a good thing, too; for this was the quiet time, when Jesus would grow strong, and be ready for the work His Father had for Him.

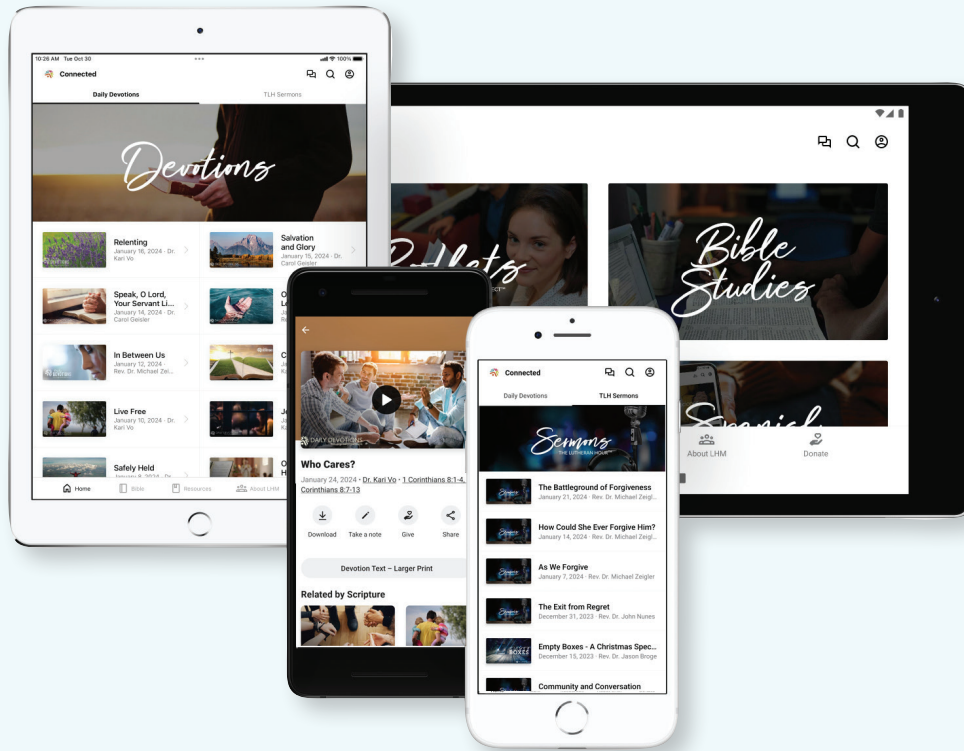
Years later would come the suffering, the betrayal, the cross, and the borrowed tomb; and then the glory of Jesus' resurrection, as He came back from death to share everlasting life and joy with those who trust in Him. But now—now was for quietness, and trust, and thanking God. And when we have such times in our lives, let's use them the same way.

WE PRAY: *Thank You, dear Lord, for the growth and healing You give me during peaceful times. Amen.*

Reflect & Discuss

- Are you in a time of peace, a time of crisis, or some mixture?
- How does that change your prayers?
- Are you looking forward to things changing, or are you content as you are right now?

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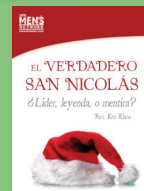
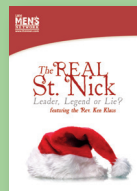
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Come, Let Us
Adore Him

Christmastime is when we look again to God's great love and mercy. It is when we consider Jesus' lowly birth—God coming to us a Child—and marvel at a love so freely given to a world so hostile and corrupt. There is really no response possible other than "Come, Let Us Adore Him!" At Christmas, God has come to us in His Son. Truly, "This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!"



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