

The
Thread of
Christmas

2025 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



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The Thread of Christmas: An Advent Devotional

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INTRODUCTION

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The Gospel threads itself through the entirety of Scripture. From Genesis to Malachi, from Matthew to Revelation, the Scripture reveals the redemptive plan of God through Jesus Christ. Scripture foretells Christ's birth, describes His earthly ministry, and displays His redemptive purpose through His death on the cross.

Salem's Advent devotional this year, *The Thread of Christmas*, follows this "scarlet thread" throughout Scripture.

THE THREAD OF CHRISTMAS

The Thread of Christmas is a four-week devotional that guides you through the Advent season. As you read through the devotions, allow the Holy Spirit to show you how the story of redemption is evident in all Scripture.

STRUCTURE

This book contains daily devotions for the four weeks of Advent. Each day has a main Scripture passage, devotional thought, and a prayer. We encourage you to carve out some time each day to read through the Scripture passage. You may even want to look at the verses before and after each passage to give you an idea of the context. The deeper you dig into God's word, the more wonderful meaning you will find.

Thanks to Salem's members and staff for their contributions to *The Thread of Christmas*. Your creativity, hard work, and love for God are evident in these pages.

May you encounter the Savior in a new, fresh, and exciting way this Christmas season.

WHERE CHRISTMAS BEGAN

READ: GENESIS 3:15

THE STORY OF CHRISTMAS BEGINS IN A GARDEN...

We prepare for the celebration of the coming King by making plans with family and friends, hanging decorations, and attending Spirit-filled worship services. As believers, we place the star on top of the Christmas tree and remember the Magi; we set up our nativity and remember baby Jesus in the manger; or we see the angels in the Christmas play and imagine their joyful proclamation to the shepherds. Our minds are flooded with the biblical story of Christmas. We often think of the story of Christmas beginning at the manger or with the angel's visit to Mary, but it actually begins about 4,000 plus years earlier, in a garden.

THE STORY OF CHRISTMAS BEGINS WITH SIN...

In the beginning, God created everything. He looked at all of His creation and said, "It was very good." Everything was perfect, just as God designed it. As Adam and Eve lived and worked in the garden and walked together with God, they experienced what it meant to have a relationship with their Creator untainted by sin.

The relationship changed when Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the fruit He had forbidden and when they trusted Satan's words instead of God's. At that moment, sin and death came into the world, and Adam and Eve's fellowship with God was broken. God responded immediately to man's disobedience with a curse on Satan, the man, the woman, and all generations that would follow them. However, in the middle of the curse, God gave us a glimmer of hope.

THE STORY OF CHRISTMAS BEGINS WITH A PROPHECY OF HOPE...

It has been said that a scarlet thread runs through Scripture, and that thread of hope and redemption of the coming Messiah begins here. Genesis 3:15 is referred to as the "proto evangelium," meaning the first good news. In this glimmer of hope, the story of Christmas begins. The future of humanity looked bleak. Man had fallen, disobeyed God, their relationship had been broken, and all of creation had been tainted by sin and its curse. This prophecy tells of the battle that will rage between God's children and evil, Satan doing everything within his power to keep the promised one from coming. But tucked in the middle of the bad news God gives good news, of the Messiah that will someday crush Satan, defeat sin and death, and restore mankind's relationship with God. This prophecy foreshadows Jesus's birth in God's perfect timing, His suffering and death on the cross, and the crushing blow that Christ's resurrection will give to Satan's plight to thwart God's redemptive plan. Here is where the story of Christmas begins.

PRAYER RESPONSE

- As you prepare your heart for Christmas, meditate on this prophecy from the mouth of God, given more than 4,000 years before the manger, about God's great plan of redemption for you.
- Take time to thank God that He is a God who always keeps His promises.
- Ask God to help you share the story of Christmas with someone this Christmas. Don't just start at the manger, but start in the garden and share the reason why we need the manger and the cross.

FAITH EVEN WHEN WE DON'T UNDERSTAND

READ: GENESIS 22:15-18

HAVE YOU EVER HAD SOMEONE TELL YOU SOMETHING that either contained such technical or big word vocabulary that you stood there blinking like a deer in headlights because you couldn't quite comprehend what they were talking about? I had this experience in college. I needed one more science class to graduate, but because I was working full time, was married, and we had a new baby, I had a very limited time window for classes I could take. So, I signed up for a senior level class called "The Physics of Relativity." It sounded interesting to geeky me. On the first day of class when the professor talked about what we would be doing that semester, I barely understood any of it and wondered if I had made a mistake, but the professor assured us that he would help us make it through the semester. I wonder if Abraham similar feelings of uncertainty when he heard this declaration of the Lord. I'm sure he couldn't fathom counting all the stars in the sky or specks of sand on the seashore. Add to that the fact that the cities of his enemies would be taken. And finally throw on the idea that through his offspring the entire earth would be blessed! I'm sure he was not able to comprehend what all this meant or how it would even be possible.

Even though Abraham didn't fully grasp what the Lord was promising, he knew the Lord could do it because he had seen the Lord fulfilling His promises in the past. And he knew that He is God and that no one could stand against Him or His plans. Abraham's faith in God was the key to

his trusting Him and is even highlighted in the "Faith Hall of Fame" in Hebrews 11. When the angel told Abraham that all the earth would be blessed through him, did he know that from his lineage the Savior of the world would come to earth? Did he understand that our salvation today was in that promise? It is an overwhelming feeling to know that when God made this promise to Abraham that He had me and you in mind. What an awesome God we serve!

PRAYER RESPONSE

Lord, thank you that you are a God whose promises are always fulfilled. That when you say it, we can believe it. Thank you for the example you have given us in your Word of Abraham's faith. I pray that you would help us to find the strength to have that same faith. And thank you for having me on your mind when you promised Abraham that the entire world would be blessed through him.

Amen

JESUS FROM THE TRIBE OF JUDAH?

READ: GENESIS 49:8-12

IN GENESIS 49, AS JACOB NEARS THE END OF HIS LIFE, he gathers his sons and gives each a blessing that the Bible describes as being suitable to them (Genesis 49:28). In the midst of these blessings, we find a beautiful messianic prophecy in which Judah is told that the scepter would never depart from him. Beginning with David, the royal line of kings would come from the tribe of Judah and culminate in Jesus, our eternal King.

As a young believer, I often wondered, “Why Judah?” Judah wasn’t the firstborn, nor was he born to Jacob’s favorite wife. He was the fourth son of Leah, the woman Jacob had been tricked into marrying. Scripture records some unsavory details about Judah’s life. He failed to provide for his daughter-in-law after the death of his sons and used her for his own pleasure. Judah’s jealousy led him to mistreat his brother Joseph and sell him into slavery. Why would God choose the tribe of Judah for the lineage of kings leading to Jesus? To my young, presumptuous self, it seemed that Jacob’s son Joseph would be a better candidate to be the ancestor of Jesus because Joseph trusted and honored God through the many difficult circumstances of his life.

Then one day as I was reading through the book of Genesis, I saw another side of Judah. By this time in chapter 44, Joseph is second in command in Egypt and is distributing grain during the famine. Judah and his brothers are returning home after obtaining grain a second time.

Judah’s willingness to offer himself up for his brother points clearly to Christ’s sacrificial work

Joseph has a silver cup hidden in his brother Benjamin’s bag of grain and then accuses Benjamin of stealing it. When the cup is found, the brothers all return to Joseph. Joseph gives the brothers the opportunity to leave Benjamin behind as his slave and return to their home, but Judah refuses to leave Benjamin behind. Instead, in his defining moment, Judah offers to take Benjamin’s place. As I saw Judah offer himself up for his brother, I thought to myself - isn’t that a beautiful picture of what Christ has done for me? I was born a slave to sin, and Jesus offered Himself up for me, taking the punishment that I deserve, so that I could be free forever. I’m sure God has many other reasons for choosing the tribe of Judah, but Judah’s willingness to offer himself up for his brother points clearly to Christ’s sacrificial work on the cross. In the flawed character of Judah I see a glimpse of the perfect character of Jesus Christ.

PRAYER RESPONSE

Thank you, Jesus from the tribe of Judah, for being a willing sacrifice for my sins and making it possible for me to walk free. Help me to walk in the freedom that you purchased with your blood.

Amen

THE KING OF PROPHECY

READ: 2 SAMUEL 7:8-16

THE PROMISE OF DAVID'S LINEAGE TO ONE DAY LEAD TO THE MESSIAH is one of the more popular old testament prophecies.

Given originally back in 2nd Samuel chapter seven, we see the prophet Nathan tell David himself this exact promise. And both the gospels of Matthew and Luke confirm this lineage by listing the genealogy of Jesus all the way back to David and beyond.

However, as many may have seen before, these genealogies are actually different. In fact, they are immediately different because they both list a different father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Is this a contradiction in God's Word? Quite the opposite. While we don't know for certain, most agree on two possibilities for these differences. One possibility is that one is the lineage of Joseph and the other is of Mary since there is not a Koine Greek word for "son in law." The other is that one is the biological genealogy of Jesus and the other is the legal genealogy of Jesus since the eldest brother would marry his deceased brother's widow if his brother had not yet had a son. This way, the first son of this new union would carry on the name of the dead brother (Heli in Jesus' genealogy) so his name and lineage could be preserved.

And it wasn't just the authors of the gospels that knew this genealogy to be true. In a collection of documented discussions by the Pharisees coined "Sanhedrin 43a," we find something incredibly interesting. In a discussion related to Jesus Himself, the following statement can be found: "Rather, Jesus was different, as he had close ties with the government." Which government could the Pharisees be talking about? Clearly not Rome or King Herod, considering Jesus was fully Jewish and

not in King Herod's line. What government could this possibly be other than King David himself? The tribe of Judah was one of the only two tribes to preserve their lineage and the greatest "government" of either of these tribes is obviously the kings of Judah, with David being at the top!

Additionally, Isaiah 9:7 also records the prophecy of Jesus one day descending from David. We have a copy of this EXACT chapter in a scroll that has been dated to 125 B.C. This means we have a copy of the David prophecy written well over 100 years before Jesus was born. Combine this with the gospel accounts showing us that no matter how you spin it legally and/or biologically, Jesus was for sure from king David and add in the documentation of the Pharisees discussing Jesus being related to the government of Judah and you either have an insanely mathematically impossible coincidence; or the TRUTH.

PRAYER RESPONSE

This Christmas, ask the Lord for the truth of Jesus to come to light like it never has for you before. God's Word has been preserved through history unlike anything else ever authored. When you take a step back and realize how impossible it is for a single man to fulfill hundreds and hundreds of prophecies, the authenticity of the Bible comes to light like never before. So ask God for that truth to grab your heart during Advent this year!

LOVE THAT DEFIES REASON

READ: ISAIAH 7:14

TODAY'S PASSAGE IS ONE OF THE MOST WELL KNOWN MESSIANIC PROPHECIES: "the virgin shall conceive ... and shall call his name Immanuel." Today, it is mostly quoted in the context of Christmas plays and greeting cards, but what was the context when Isaiah first spoke this prophecy to King Ahaz?

Let's start with who King Ahaz was. Both 2 Kings 16:2 and 2 Chronicles 28:1 echo the same condemnation: "he [Ahaz] did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God, as his father David had done." It gets worse from there: "[he] burned his sons as an offering, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel." (2 Chronicles 28:3)

Yikes. That is not something you'll find on a Christmas card! Why is a man like this the one to hear a message of hope from God's prophet?

Despite his evil, King Ahaz, king of Judah, was still of the line of David. God ordered Isaiah to go to Ahaz, unsent for, and speak comfort even while his enemies moved to conquer the kingdom. God even grants Ahaz his own choice of a sign from heaven to confirm that what the Lord says through Isaiah is true.

How does Ahaz respond to this amazing word from the Lord? He refused the Lord's offer. Certainly, he couched it to appear pious saying "I will not test the Lord" as if it would be somehow wrong to do what God just told him to do. It is much more likely that his heart wished to avoid putting himself under obligation to the true God.

This is the context of the prophecy. It was given to an evil King, who when shown grace beyond reason still refused to trust himself to God. If we skip to verse 17, we see judgement finally prophesied against Ahaz, but before that judgement comes words of hope and future promise.

The contrast is astounding. On one side is King Ahaz, having freshly rejected the Lord yet again as part of a lifetime of following the "abominations of the nations." On the other side is the Creator of all, perfectly holy and perfectly just, who is planning to send His Son to die, purely so that people like King Ahaz can be saved from their sin, if only they will turn to Him.

Shortly before sitting down to write this devotion, I was listening to one of my favorite Christian artists: Michael Card. His lyrics often have a way of conveying the truth of scripture in a way that is arresting, and one of his lyrics sticks with me now: "Could it be that you would really rather die, than live without us?"

The answer is "Yes." God chose to come to Earth as the Son of a virgin... to die. For no other reason, than so that we could live together in a right relationship with Him. This plan was in the mouth of God's prophet even as he spoke with someone like King Ahaz.

I cannot wrap my head around that. It makes no sense, but such is the greatness of God's love and mercy for us.

PRAYER RESPONSE

Lord, I cannot fathom how much you love us, and my mind cannot grasp the full extent of the mercies you have shown us. I don't know what to say other than thank you. Help me to remember this truth, and to respond with faith and love for You.

Amen

A KINGDOM OF EVERLASTING PEACE!

READ: ISAIAH 9:7

LATELY, I'VE "DISCOVERED" SOMETHING ABOUT MYSELF: the more I watch the news, the angrier and sadder I become about the state of our world. It's hard not to despair when faced with the selfishness, corruption, and pain that seem to fill the headlines. But in those moments, I must remind myself to turn off the TV, stop scrolling, and turn my eyes toward God.

Because our God is still on the throne. He is all-powerful, and He promises to return and set everything right. Isaiah 9:7 reminds us that *"the Lord's power will increase, and there will be peace without end."*

In a world like ours, it's hard to even imagine what that peace will look like—a world free from selfishness and strife, where every heart flourishes and every person lives in harmony with one another. A world overflowing with the glory of God.

Whatever frustrations or fears we feel about the powers of this world—governments

*...we can still hold onto joy and hope.
Because Christ, our Light, has already come!*

near or far—we can rest in the Lord's promise of His coming reign. Isaiah paints a picture of that kingdom: one filled with peace, justice, and righteousness. And Isaiah 9:7 assures us that this perfect reign will come about because of God's fierce love and steadfast commitment to His people.

And there's even more comfort in Isaiah 9:2: *"On those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned."* When we feel the weight of that

darkness—when the news leaves a pit in our stomach or sorrow in our hearts—we can still hold onto joy and hope. Because Christ, our Light, has already come! His light guides us, strengthens us, and reminds us that a kingdom of everlasting peace is on the horizon.

Hallelujah! Thank you, Lord, for your love and goodness. Thank you for the hope we have in You — hope for today, and hope that shines forevermore.

PRAYER RESPONSE

Before we go about the rest of our day, let's pray these things to God for his glory:

- Give thanks that the Lord will bring about His promised kingdom of peace, justice, and righteousness
- Pray for the spread of Christ's light—that His love and truth would reach those living in spiritual darkness
- Pray for peace in your own spirit, that Christ's light would replace fear and despair with hope and joy

SMALL TOWN, BIG PROMISE

READ: MICAH 5:2

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHY OF ALL PLACES, Bethlehem was selected? Bethlehem wasn't the most obvious choice for the birthplace of a king. In fact, it was one of the smallest towns around, and no one would have expected the Messiah to be born there. No one, that is, except the prophet Micah who knew this place was special. After all, Bethlehem was where King David was from. While other cities like Jerusalem or Samaria drew attention, God chose Bethlehem, a seemingly insignificant town, as the birth place of the true King.

But God loves using the small and overlooked to accomplish great things. Unlike the world that looks for greatness in things like money, possessions, status, and influence, God delights in working through what seems ordinary. Bethlehem whose name means "House of Bread" would become the birthplace of the Bread of Life. Micah reminds us that the ruler over Israel would not appear by accident—He would come at God's appointed time.

Micah's prophecy speaks of both hope and God's faithfulness. In a time when Israel faced uncertainty, this promise assured them that God had not forgotten His people. Even when circumstances seemed dark, His plan for salvation was quietly unfolding behind the scenes. Bethlehem reminds us that God often uses the weak and the unlikely to accomplish great things for His glory.

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In the most unexpected way, the Savior of the world entered our broken world through a small town instead of a grand palace or throne. Trust that no place or person is too small for God to use. So, if you think you are too little to make an impact, let Bethlehem remind you how small towns make big impacts.

PRAYER RESPONSE

Lord, thank You for choosing what is small and humble to accomplish Your greatest work. Help us to see Your hand in the ordinary moments of life.

Amen

OBEDIENCE IN THE HARD THINGS

READ: MATTHEW 1:18-25

HAVE YOU EVER HAD YOUR PLANS FALL THROUGH? Perhaps you had a special event canceled due to weather or illness? Or maybe a friend flake out at the last minute? Or your parents or spouse planned something else that took priority over your plans? It stinks!

In today's passage, we see Joseph's plans (at least some of them) start to fall through. He was betrothed to Mary (engaged but with the power of a contract). He would have been looking forward to their wedding, preparing for their life together, for the children they would have together. And then it all seemed to fall apart. Though we aren't told how he found out or what he believed the cause to be, Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant. Gone were his plans of a normal wedding, a normal newlywed experience, a normal family. Yet, even in what would have been a frustrating, confusing time for him, we see Joseph respond in verse 19 with grace towards Mary, revealing his character.

*... when God changes our plans,
He does so with purpose.*

So, as Joseph is preparing to change his initial plans, what does God do? He sends an angel in a dream to Joseph, and tells him to change his plans again! That quiet divorce is off the table and, instead, Joseph is charged to marry Mary and serve as the foster father to the Messiah, playing his role in the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy we read on December 4. Unlike Luke's account of Mary's angelic visit and her song, Matthew doesn't tell us how Joseph felt or thought about this. Instead, we are left only with Joseph's actions in verses 24-25. He obeys. He obeys immediately and completely.

How do you respond when your plans are changed? How do you respond when it is God who changes them? We have examples in the Old Testament of imperfect responses. Pharaoh chose stubborn rebellion (Exodus 7-14). Saul, when Samuel was late, chose pride over obedience (1 Samuel 13). Jonah chose to run (Jonah 1). If I am not leaning on the Holy Spirit for strength, I know I tend toward frustration and resentment. But Joseph's example reminds us that, when God changes our plans, He does so with purpose. It's so easy to forget that His plans are best, better than anything we can imagine. Christian, when God changes our plans, let us remember Joseph and live in complete obedience.

PRAYER RESPONSE

Almighty God,
Thank you for your plans. Thank you for including me in them.
Help me remember that your plans are always best. When you
change my plans, keep my heart from resentment and fill me with
the desire to obey.

Amen

MARY'S ANTICIPATION OF THE SAVIOR

READ: LUKE 1:26-38

HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED MARY'S LIFE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE of what God was calling her to, from the perspective of how her life would forever be changed after her encounter with the angel Gabriel? God was calling Mary to a mission that would forever change her life, and that would not be fulfilled in her lifetime. What great faith Mary had to find to fulfill the calling that was placed on her life. God had a plan for Mary and He brought her a helper for the journey. God was faithful to provide Mary with a friend in Elizabeth, someone who would believe her unbelievable story and support her as she carried and raised the Savior of the World.

The anticipation of God's plan being fulfilled through Mary did not stop when Jesus was born. Mary's newborn son still had much to accomplish to fulfill the words the angel spoke to her. Every day that Mary spent with Jesus, she would have been looking forward to what was to come. Mary lived every day anticipating the day when Jesus would fulfill the prophecies of a Savior, and so can we. Mary's story shows us that God is faithful to provide for His people. Mary's story shows us what enduring faith looks like, when times are uncertain and when God's promises take longer than expected to be fulfilled. Mary's story shows us what trusting God looks like when she answered "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

If God has called you to a seemingly impossible task, if God's plan for your life is taking longer to unfold than you anticipated, if following God's will is harder than you thought it would be, consider Mary's story again. Reflect upon how she anticipated her Savior in the womb, how she anticipated her Savior during His life, and she never stopped looking forward to Him coming back again. Let us also look up to heaven each day with joy for who God is, what He has done, and what He is coming back to do.

PRAYER RESPONSE

Lord, help us to anticipate You the way Mary did—with enduring faith, unyielding humility, and unending joyful expectation. In this season of Advent, fill our hearts with hope as we remember the Savior who came, who is with us right now, and who will come again to defeat evil and remove all pain and suffering from the world.

Amen

BELIEVE GOD'S PLAN

READ: LUKE 1:39-45

WHEN I READ THE VERSES ABOUT MARY VISITING ELIZABETH, I could visualize the need we have as God speaks to us through His Spirit and His Word to believe. It must have been overwhelming to Mary after hearing God's message. Going to visit Elizabeth, God in His plan, would give Elizabeth words to say to encourage and assure Mary of God's plan to bless her and her child to come.

God speaks to us through different channels. His Spirit and His Word can speak loudly to us to make decisions and accept the roles we are being asked to follow. Believing the messages will be accomplished can be challenging and full of "why me" questions. To trust, commit and surrender to God can help us focus on His plan. Unexpectedly a message came to me that I did not need to work past the next year. I had examined my situation and did not think it was wise. My response was "I don't have a plan." Within me the message came, "you don't need a plan." God's plan for my life was being unfolded and I needed to believe and submit to God's plan. I redid numbers and made the decision to retire at the beginning of the year. Looking back, my believing and submitting to His plan lead me to do His will for my life. God's timing led to things being accomplished, opportunities being open and evidence that my life had different purposes.

*To trust, commit and surrender to God
can help us focus on His plan.*

Mary felt confident to visit Elizabeth. When God is working in our lives he can direct us to someone to encourage us, give us direction and be the one to say to us what we need to hear. Just as Mary visited Elizabeth, God can use each of us in different ways to guide and assure others that what the Lord has said will be accomplished. His promises and His plans have been a testament to His power and His love for each of us.

PRAYER RESPONSE

Pray for God's Spirit to guide us in our decisions and to believe He has a plan for each of us.

IN JESUS!

READ: LUKE 1:46-56

ONE OF MY FAVORITE THINGS ABOUT CHRISTMAS is the music. For those of you who begin playing Christmas music when the fall starts (or any time before Thanksgiving) the Lord is a merciful and forgiving God, and I am waiting for you to stop straying from Him. My children always try to trick me into playing Christmas music before Thanksgiving Day, and I politely tell them that I will put them up for adoption if they carry out their plans (I'm just kidding).

Of all of the Christmas songs I know and love, perhaps the greatest song has never been played on a radio, and you will not find it in any hymn book. It is found in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 1, and it is referred to as the Magnificat, more specifically, Mary's Magnificat. This is the song Mary sang when she visited her cousin Elizabeth shortly after finding out that she would bear the long-awaited Messiah.

What I love about her song is the setting of the song. Think about it. Mary is pregnant with a child, and this happens to her in a way that most would not even attempt to believe. A virgin being pregnant? She would have a hard time explaining this to anyone. She could face stoning because of the appearance of her condition (remember that even the Pharisees in John 8:41 told Jesus, "we weren't born of immorality"). She even, for a time, had a fiancé who wondered if he should even go through with the marriage. Despite all of this, what do we find in Luke 1? Mary praises Yahweh. Why? Because all that mattered was that inside of her was the Savior! Friends, what a picture for us. All that matters is that Jesus, the Son of God, lives inside of us in the Person of the Holy Spirit. If that is true of us, it matters not what the world or the forces of

hell throw at us – we have a reason to praise the same God Mary praised so many years ago. No matter what we face, we find from Mary's Magnificat and from the thread of Scripture the truth that in:

JESUS, we find **PRAISE**

JESUS, we find the **GREATNESS OF GOD**

JESUS, we find a **REASON TO REJOICE**

JESUS, we find **OUR SAVIOR**

JESUS, we find the **ATTENTION OF GOD**

JESUS, we find **UNENDING BLESSING**

JESUS, we find **MIGHT**

JESUS, we find **HOLINESS**

JESUS, we find **MERCY**

JESUS, we find **ACTION**

JESUS, we find **VICTORY**

JESUS, we find **SATISFYING PROVISION**

JESUS, we find **HELP**

JESUS, we find **REMEMBRANCE**

JESUS, we find **A PROMISE KEPT**

Jesus, the sweetest Name I know! Merry Christmas!

PRAYER RESPONSE

Father, help me see Jesus in this season. In the midst of the busyness of Christmas, may You open my heart to see that the most important truth of this season, and every second, is Jesus!

Amen

ZECHARIAH'S ANTICIPATION OF THE SAVIOR

READ: LUKE 1:57-79

ZECHARIAH WAS AN ELDERLY PRIEST DOING HIS PRIESTLY DUTIES. He had a wife named Elizabeth that had never had children, and was living in disgrace within her community. Zechariah has a powerful encounter with the angel Gabriel who promises a son, to be named John. We know him as John the Baptist. Gabriel promises John will be great and lead the way.

But Zechariah doubted, and was struck mute... for 9 months until the child was born.

- Imagine not being able to speak for 9 months.
- Imagine your barren wife in her old age getting pregnant.
- Imagine thinking every day about the encounter with the angel, about being a dad for the first time to a special son, about the mysteries and yet-to-be-answered questions.

Zechariah had a lot of time to think about the events that were unfolding, and their place in God's plan. He anticipated the birth of John, but also the coming of the Savior.

In vv. 67-79 Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied. In the church, this is commonly called the Benedictus, which is the Latin word for "Blessed", the first word of the prophecy. Other than uttering "His name shall be John", these are the first words Zechariah has spoken in 9 months.

Take some time to read the Benedictus (Luke 1: 67-79).

Q: What jumps out at you?

Q: How is this passage about John? How is this about Jesus?

Q: What does Zechariah bless God for?

(To "bless God" means to praise Him for His nature and His works.)

PRAYER RESPONSE

Take some time now to bless God. Reflect on the things he is doing around you, even if you don't understand them. Thank Him.

"God, help me to not doubt, but anticipate that You can do amazing, impossible things... because You are so amazing. Help me as I anticipate this Christmas season."

Amen

HEY! UNTO YOU A CHILD IS BORN!

READ: LUKE 2:1-7

THE CHRISTMAS SEASON BRINGS MANY THINGS — anticipation of celebrating the birth of Jesus, shopping for gifts for loved ones, Christmas parties for school, church, work, carrying on family traditions... And while I'm not an avid Christmas-movie viewer, there is one movie that I remember so vividly and loved from childhood. I read the book, watched the movie every time it was on television, and my home church put on the play throughout the years: *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever!*

I remember in the movie, the church folks had major reservations that the Herdmans (the neighborhood nuisance children) would be in their annual Christmas pageant. I remember reading the book time after time, trying to put myself in their shoes. My home church had our own version of the Herdmans – a few kids that we picked up on the church van. Their family didn't have much money, manners, or Bible knowledge... and they didn't have parents at home either.

Our "Herdmans" got on the van every Sunday for two months at 9:30am. They arrived at our fellowship hall and ate whatever breakfast had been left over from the prayer meeting that morning. They attended Sunday school with my friends and myself. At the worship service, they sat on the pew behind me. They didn't know the words to the hymns. They didn't know how to greet others in the church when it was time for everyone to "shake the hand or hug the neck of those around you" encouraged from the pulpit. After church, they were dropped back off at their home, and we'd pick them up a few hours later for play practice.

There were a lot of "church" things that the Herdmans (the fictional ones, and the real ones) didn't know, and didn't know how to do. But they kept coming back. Something was drawing them to keep getting on that van each week for church and for play practice. When the time came for us to put on our play, (even after hearing the youngest yell her line, "Hey! Unto you a Child is born!") everything we knew about them changed. They seemed completely different. It was as if those weeks of practice and coming to church, God revealed the gift of His presence to them. And for the first time, they understood.

That was a long time ago, and I don't know where the years have taken those kids. Maybe they have started families of their own, with their own Christmas traditions; and maybe they have all the things they lacked before. I sure hope so. One thing is for certain as this time of year comes around, I'm thankful for the gift our church gave to the "Herdmans" and the gift they were to us.

PRAYER RESPONSE

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for the gift of Jesus. Thank you for sending Him to live, die, and be raised again for us. Thank you that through salvation, we have the promise of living with You eternally. Help us to ponder these things in our hearts as we celebrate Christmas.

Amen

THE BIRTH ANNOUNCED BY THE ANGELS

READ: LUKE 2:8-21

I LOVE CHRISTMAS, AND THIS PARTICULAR PASSAGE of the Christmas story evokes many fond memories of hearing it recited by Linus in “A Charlie Brown Christmas”. And even though I have heard this passage read or read it myself hundreds of times, I still get a sense of awe when I try to imagine the magnificent sight the shepherds saw that night.

Imagine going about your regular routine tending your sheep in a dark field with only the stars and maybe a fire for light. You and the other shepherds are sitting around chewing the fat when all of sudden, angels are right there in front of you! You are terrified to look yet compelled to look at the same time. You have never seen anything like this, and the atmosphere is mesmerizing. Your fear is immediately dissipated when one of the angels speaks saying, “Do not be afraid.”

Then the angel tells you about the birth of the Messiah and where you can find Him. At this announcement, the host of angels begins to praise God declaring His glory. I like to imagine how beautiful and moving that must have been. I get Jesus bumps when our choir and congregation sings “Glory to God in the highest”, so I greatly look forward to joining in with the angels to sing.

When the angels left, the shepherds did not hesitate to take action. They didn’t worry about losing their jobs or what other people would think. They didn’t even leave one guy behind to care for the sheep. They went right away to Bethlehem to look for this special baby. After they found Him, they didn’t keep the news to themselves. The Bible says that they spread the word, and everyone who heard it was amazed.

This was contradictory to the times. Shepherds were of low status and were viewed as unclean so generally, they were avoided. However, they were the ones chosen by God to hear this good news, and the people listened to them!

PRAYER RESPONSE

Gloria in excelsis Deo!

Father, God,

May we keep the shepherds’ jubilee and adoration in our hearts this Christmas. May we not hesitate to share this joyous news. May we remember the angel said that this good news is for all people. May those who don’t know You have listening ears and receptive hearts.

Amen

THE BIRTH CELEBRATED BY SIMEON

READ: LUKE 2:22-35

SIMEON MAY OR MAY NOT BE A NAME YOU RECOGNIZE in the New Testament. Luke describes him as a righteous and devout man. Following the Holy Spirit's lead, he enters the temple when Mary and Joseph present a newborn baby Jesus to the priest. Luke tells us he was "waiting for the consolation of Israel" - meaning, the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die before beholding the Christ.

At the sight of Jesus, he can't help but to praise God. For years he waited, fasted, and prayed for the arrival of the Messiah. Simeon approaches Mary and Joseph with joy in his heart and prophecies over the newborn King. He proclaims that this Child is "God's salvation," foretelling the magnitude of what He would accomplish on the cross. Simeon can see that Jesus will be a beacon of light to the nations. He will shine into the darkest recesses of the human heart and be the only One powerful enough to transform it.

Many in Israel would "rise" by submitting their lives to Him in faith. Others would "fall" and fail to believe that Jesus is the Christ. They would look heavily on the Law, but not recognize the One who wrote it. They would be so satisfied with the fruit of their own labor- power, money, success, comfort, etc... that they would not see their need for a Savior at all.

"The hearts of many would be revealed" by His presence. Jesus already knows all the ugly places of our hearts, yet He still loves us. He left His heavenly throne in perfect unity with the Father and Holy Spirit. He came to earth as an infant to live a life of servitude to mankind.

The most powerful Being in the universe descended from on high to perform the most humble act of service in history. Because of His magnificent glory and power, He made Himself known to all the nations as the Savior and Lord of the universe when He rose again after three days in the grave. "That at the name of Jesus every knee will bow in heaven, and on earth and under the earth..." Philippians 2:10.

Let us praise with joy in our hearts, like Simeon, and be overwhelmed with contentedness in the gospel.

PRAYER RESPONSE

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the miracle You gave us in Your Son. Let us not look to anything this world can offer us for the joy and satisfaction that can only be found in You. We ask forgiveness for the areas we have found cheap fulfillment apart from Your love. Like Simeon, help us to walk in humble adoration of what You have done, what You are doing, and what You promise You will do. We love you Lord.

Amen

WHERE WILL YOU BOW THIS CHRISTMAS?

READ: MATTHEW 2:1-8

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, MY FAVORITE CHRISTMAS DECORATION sat on a wooden end table next to the couch in our living room. It was a ceramic figurine of the manger with baby Jesus sleeping peacefully in the hay. What I liked most was that bowing in worship next to the manger, with a long white beard, red hat in hand, was none other than Old Saint Nick. This was, for me, a picture of those personified worldly altars that we often bow before during the holiday season bowing before the true meaning of Christmas, the one true king, Jesus Christ. We all bow before something or someone at Christmas and the holiday season has a way of bringing what we truly worship to the surface. This Christmas will it be Jesus or like Herod, something else?

As the Magi came into Jerusalem looking for the new born King of the Jews, so that they could worship Him, the Bible tells us that Herod, also known as “the King of the Jews,” was troubled. The word that Matthew uses to describe Herod’s reaction to this new born king means to be panicked, agitated, or stirred up. Why was Herod so stirred up? Herod saw himself as king, he wanted to be the one worshipped. The King of kings, Lord of lords, and creator of the universe had just been born and Herod was focused on himself, his ambition, and the possibility of losing his power, his status, and his wealth.

In his panic, Herod consulted with the scribes to find out that the Scripture prophesied this new king would be born in Bethlehem. He reported this to the Magi and sent them on their way to find the baby, so that he too could come and worship. We know that even though Herod said he wanted to worship the new king, we know that he actually

wanted to kill the baby Jesus to protect his own power, status, and wealth. He gave the appearance of excitement about worshipping the new born king, but he actually was bowing before another altar that first Christmas.

How about you? Where are you bowing this Christmas? Herod bowed before the altar of self, his own ambition, and power. There are so many other idols that are trying to replace the true King of kings on the altar of our lives. This Christmas, those idols that we bow before could be family, gifts, our traditions, or is it the babe in the manger, Jesus, the true meaning of Christmas.

PRAYER RESPONSE

Take a moment and ask God to show you where you are bowing this Christmas.

Where are you spending the most time, energy, and thought this season?

If your focus and worship is somewhere other than Jesus, would you ask God to help you make that adjustment?

WE HAVE COME TO WORSHIP HIM

READ: MATTHEW 2:9-12

THE EVENTS RECORDED IN MATTHEW 2 ARE SUCH A UNIQUE and interesting story. I think it has lost some of its “uniqueness” because we have read it so many times. It is noteworthy that Matthew is the only one of the gospel writers to include it in his book.

Sometime after the birth of Jesus, visitors arrive to see the newborn child. We know very little from scripture about these men except that they came from the east (probably from Persia). Who were they? How long and how far had they traveled? Where was their home? What were their names? Were they rich and famous?

So many questions with no answers. But Matthew does answer the most important question, “Why had they come!” These Magi, Wise Men, Kings, or whatever title you choose to call them by came to bow before the child and worship Him. They came to worship the new-born king! I think Matthew wants us to know that this child that was born in Bethlehem, this babe that was in the manger who’s birth we celebrate, was not just the long-awaited Messiah, not just the Savior of the world, He is actually a King sent from God to rule in the hearts of men!

Will you receive Him as your king and allow Him to rule in your life every day?

Matthew tells us in verse 12: “And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another way.” Stanley Jones says, “No one can really see Christ and go back the same way. Life becomes different from that hour.”

PRAYER RESPONSE

Lord, may we allow you to be our Savior, Lord, and King this Christmas season and every day in the coming year.

Amen

THE WORD BECAME FLESH

READ: JOHN 1:1-14

AS A HIGH SCHOOL MATH TEACHER, I have recently taught the concept of modeling based on real-world data. Companies use past data to forecast future needs, and many models can fit a data set—linear, quadratic, and exponential, to name a few. While models can be fairly accurate, it is very rare that they fit the data perfectly.

John 1:1-14 shares the glorious truth with us that Jesus is not just a model of God that “mostly” fits his character. Jesus is not merely a reflection of who God is. Rather, he is the exact representation of God. The opening verses of the passage tell us that the Word (Jesus) was with God in the beginning. From the beginning of time, Jesus existed with God. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made. In verse 10, John tells us that despite the world being made through Jesus, the world did not recognize him when he came to earth. As he came fully man and fully God, John states, “The word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (vs. 14). Hebrews 1:3 reiterates that the Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact imprint of his nature.

The model Son that God sent is who we celebrate at Christmas — the Son full of grace and truth. We have to study this model if we are going to get to know him and become like him. Christmas is a time where many things are going on: shopping, parties, and traditions. These are not bad things, but let’s never stop looking at our model. Invest some extra time this season in one of the Gospels. Examine how Jesus lived.

God sent him as a model of grace and truth for us. He came to be the light shining in the darkness. The One who has been since the beginning came to earth. This was God’s plan from the beginning for our future hope.

PRAYER RESPONSE

Lord, Thank you for sending Jesus to earth to be our perfect model. Help me to spend time in your word each day so I can see your character and strive to become more like you.

Amen

SLAVES TO SONS

READ: GALATIANS 4:4-7

WE ALL LOVE A GOOD RAGS TO RICHES STORY, RIGHT? We can't help but root for Cinderella to meet her prince or for Charlie to find the golden ticket or for Annie to escape the orphanage and become Daddy Warbucks' daughter. There's just something so heartwarming about the person who cannot possibly help themselves being saved out of a desperate situation to go on and live happily ever after.

Christian - do you realize that's your story too? At just the perfect time in history, God sent Jesus, fully human, under the law, and fully God, powerful and perfect enough to redeem us. Slaves to our sin and the law, we brought nothing to our redemption but the sin that required it. God didn't stop at just our redemption though. Not only do we receive redemption, but we receive adoption. Some Bibles will translate that as adoption as God's children or adoption as God's sons and daughters. It is important to note that Paul used the male-gendered noun on purpose though. At this point in time, in order to receive an inheritance, you had to be a son. In the ancient Near East, sons had all the legal rights and privileges of inheritance. All Christians, male or female, are named sons of God. We all receive sonship and inheritance in Christ. At a time when women were mainly considered property and possibly a liability, what an amazing promise of God this is for us!

Because of Jesus, we get the privilege to approach our Father in assurance

And because we are sons, we cry out to our Father through the Spirit with the confidence and intimacy of a child crying out for his daddy. We don't have to clean ourselves up or get our act together. We don't approach God timidly or fearfully. Because of Jesus, we get the privilege to approach our Father in assurance because we are so so loved. How wide and long and high and deep is God's love for us (Ephesians 3:18)!

PRAYER RESPONSE

Father God,
You are loving and generous beyond compare. Thank you for sending Jesus. Thank you for redeeming us and saving us from our sins. Even though you didn't have to, you brought us into your family. Thank you that we get to approach you as our loving Father.

Amen

THE KINDNESS OF GOD...

READ: TITUS 3:4-8

IDON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT WHEN I THINK ABOUT GOD, I typically think of His love, His mercy, His justice, His judgment and things like that. But in this passage, Paul tells us it was His “kindness” (and love) that was a key reason for doing what He did.

I've seen a definition of Biblical kindness as “...a deep, active, and intentional virtue rooted in love, mercy, and compassion. It goes beyond simple politeness to include actions like forgiving enemies, speaking life to others, and seeking out the needs of those around you.”

Isn't that what God did? Because of His kindness, He sought out the needs of those He created, even though vs.2 says that we were foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to lusts and pleasures, malicious, envious, hateful, and hurting one another.

To be honest, were I to meet someone like this, I would run in the opposite direction as fast as I could. But God didn't! Instead, in His kindness, He chose to initiate meeting the needs of those very people (us!).

And what was the “need” that we all had? The need to be rescued from a life actively lived in hostility to God as vs.2 describes (the Bible calls this sin!). But due to His kindness, “He saved us” from all those things and more! It was “not on the basis of deeds which we have done...” (because like vs.2 says, the deeds we had done were not really very good!)

No, God didn't run away from us. Instead, He sent Jesus to earth to fix the problem, paying the penalty for us (on the cross), so we would not have to pay it ourselves!

Paul tells us that God radically transformed us by the power of the Holy Spirit – giving us a new heart (one that loves Him rather than hates Him!), a renewed mind (one that sees His will and His ways as good and worthy to be sought after), and a changed will (so that rather than fight against God, we would now actively seek to please and honor Him as He deserves).

He even went a step further, (as if all that wasn't enough!), and made us “heirs” of eternal life! Oh, how kind God has been to us!

And because of all of this, Paul simply encourages us to “be careful to engage in good deeds” toward others (rather than doing the things we used to do).

This Christmas, let us be thankful — not simply for our family, our friends, and the gifts we receive, but for the “kindness” of the God who saved us.

PRAYER RESPONSE

Father, thank you for the kindness you showed me, (which I did not deserve!), in sending Jesus to earth so that I could be saved from who I was. Help me to respond to your kindness, by showing the same kindness to others as you give me opportunity to do so...

Amen

REFLECTING ON CHRIST'S EXALTATION

READ: REVELATION 5:1-14

THE BOOK OF REVELATION BEGINS WITH THESE WORDS, “The revelation of Jesus Christ.” It is a book about Jesus – His advent on earth, words to His people, and return in power and glory. He’s the main character of the book, the Bible, history, your life and mine. And of course, He’s the main character of Christmas. In Revelation 4, a door is opened for John into heaven, and he is invited to gaze upon the events that will take place and the One at the center of it all.

In Revelation 5, a scroll is introduced. It is a contract with a description written on the outside and the details sealed on the inside. It contains God’s redemption plans, His coming judgment, and the restoration of His creation. But it’s sealed and no one can open it. John can’t. The mighty angels can’t. The heavenly creatures can’t. None are worthy. And John begins to weep. God’s plan is on hold, His salvation delayed indefinitely.

At that moment the Lion of the Tribe of Judah appears, and He is worthy to open the scroll. John dries his tears and lifts his gaze but instead of beholding a lion, he sees a lamb, standing as if it had been slain. This is Jesus, the Lion and the Lamb. The conquering king who is the crucified Savior. He has conquered through His blood; sacrificed so He could rule. He takes the scroll and they begin to sing:

“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

Then all of heaven and earth join in and sing:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

It is a tide of praise unparalleled on the planet. There is only One who is worthy of it. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords who reigns over all. The Lion who became a lamb led to the slaughter, shedding His blood to redeem His people.

In 2016, the Virginia Tech Hokies and Tennessee Volunteers played before the largest crowd to watch a football game in history. It was called “The Battle of Bristol.” Held at the Bristol Motor Speedway halfway between both schools, 156,990 fans showed up to cheer their teams to victory. Yet it would barely rate as a middle school pep rally compared to the cheers described in Revelation. This Christmas, there is only One who is worthy of all praise. Only One who rules over all and who gave His life for all. Only One who can inspire such awe and affection, such fear and faith. The heavens cannot contain Him yet He allowed a manger to hold Him. Don’t let heaven and nature sing a solo this season. Bow your knee and lift your voice to the Lion and the Lamb.

PRAYER RESPONSE

Help me to see Jesus as both the Lion and the Lamb, to fear and love Him as Lord and Savior, and to exalt Him in my life this season.

Amen

A GREAT MULTITUDE FROM EVERY NATION

READ: REVELATION 7:9-12

AT CHRISTMAS, JESUS CAME AS A BABY, GREW IN WISDOM AND STATURE, and through His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, Jesus brought salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew and then to the Greek. (Romans 1:16)

Jesus came for everyone. However, not everyone chooses to follow Jesus. And Jesus makes it crystal clear that if you want to spend eternity in heaven, there is no other way to get there than through Jesus. (John 14:6)

Yet, in Revelation 7:9 there are SO MANY believers in Jesus that you cannot even count them. And where are they from? They're from every corner of the earth! They speak every and all languages. And they're dressed in white robes. Palm branches being waved in celebration and shouts of praise to our Savior ring out in worship.

Jesus said to His disciples in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Here we see in Revelation 7:9 that His command in Acts 1:8 is fulfilled. People from every tribe, tongue, and nation are gathered around the throne praising Jesus Christ, the lamb of God.

This tremendous scene begs the question - will you be dressed in a white robe waving palm branches and shouting your praise to our Savior Jesus? If you have any doubts about your salvation in Jesus, then pray this prayer with me.

PRAYER RESPONSE

Heavenly Father, I am not perfect. Please forgive me of my sins against You. Help me turn completely away from my sin and completely to You. I accept Your one and only son Jesus as my Lord and Savior and ask Him to come into my heart. Thank You for the gift of salvation.

Amen

ALL THINGS NEW

READ: REVELATION 21:1-5

WE ARE A PEOPLE WHO LOVE “NEW” THINGS. We love to shed the old and worn for something brand new. Last year, U.S. consumers spent an average of \$902 per person on Christmas gifts. As amazing as new things are, nothing can compare to the sacrifice God made when he sent his one and only son to be Emmanuel - “God With Us.” Nothing compares to the mighty work God has done, is doing, and will do to make all things new. This isn’t a “new” that can be satisfied by worldly pleasures or means. This “new” is only found in Jesus Christ. The one who came as a baby, lived a perfect, sinless life, died on a cross, and rose again. He is the one who promises to return to make all things new.

This world we know today, marred by sin, is full of suffering, hardship, anxiety, and injustice. What incredible hope we find in the book of Revelation. God’s promise to redeem his creation. His ultimate victory over Satan and sin. A new heaven and a new earth where God will dwell with his people for all eternity. No more sin. No more death, pain, tears, or suffering. All things will be made new - His Word is trustworthy and true!

PRAYER RESPONSE

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for dwelling with your people and making a way for us to be made new in Jesus. May we cling to the truth and trustworthiness of your Word today - that all things will be made new and we will dwell with you forever in a world without suffering. Help us to share this good news today and live with a heart of gratitude for the great things you have done. In Jesus’s Name,

Amen

GRACE THAT CHANGES OUR POSITION

READ: EPHESIANS 2:1-10

THIS BEAUTIFUL SECTION OF EPHESIANS IS FULL of something called positional truths. A positional truth is a statement God makes about our relationship with Him, a truth that doesn't rise or fall based on how we feel on any given day. On our good days and on our bad ones, these truths stand firm because God Himself declared them.

Paul starts by reminding us of our true position before we met Jesus. Not the position we like to imagine, but the one God lovingly reveals so that we can grasp the depth of His grace. Without Christ, we were spiritually dead. Dead in our trespasses and sins, children of disobedience, children of wrath, followers of Satan, opposed to God, and deserving judgment. That's not easy to read, but we can't understand grace unless we understand what we needed saving from. As grim and hopeless as this description is, he then gives two hope filled words: "But God." As dark as our condition was, God stepped in.

*God is not finished being gracious.
Not now, not ever.*

God's mercy and love stand in stunning contrast to our broken condition. He didn't wait for us to clean ourselves up or turn toward Him. He stepped in while we were still dead in our sin (5). And because of Jesus, our position before God has completely changed.

Now we are alive, raised, and seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:5-6 ESV). And Paul says that for all eternity, God intends to keep showing us "the immeasurable riches of His grace" (7). Think about that. He's not finished being gracious. Not now, not ever. That's true of you if you're in Christ. Not because you feel it, but because God declared it.

Paul wants to make it clear that our change of position is not our own doing. We are saved only by the grace of God, received through faith in Jesus Christ. And while we are not saved by works, we are assuredly saved for good works. Our obedience becomes a joyful sign that we are God's people, and our works are the unmistakable fruit of a life that has been made new in Christ.

The reality of God's wrath towards us is what makes the wonder of the cross and the accompanying grace so stunning. Too often we underestimate the level of our sin and God's hatred of our sin. We were dead in our trespasses and sins, but God has made us alive in Christ. We were under judgment, but God saved us by grace through faith. Now our lives can overflow with good works that point others to Him.

PRAYER RESPONSE

Take a few minutes of prayerful confession before God, recognizing that our sin is worse than we think it is and that we are sorry for offending him so greatly. Then, let that turn to praise as we rejoice at the good news.

A REJOICING WARRIOR

READ: ZEPHANIAH 3:17-20

LAST CHRISTMAS WE HAD A WONDERFUL THING HAPPEN. Each year when we purchase Christmas gifts we get each child a gift or gifts that pertain to just them but last Christmas we gave them a gift that ALL of us benefited from — a trip to Disney! This was something that was for all of us.

Think about vs. 17 of our text for today. Notice what the description of the Lord: Warrior, Rejoicer, Quieter, and Delighter. (I'm not so sure all of those "-er" words are actually words but it works). Think about how all of those are found in that Babe in the manger.

Jesus' coming declared a victorious war on the darkness of the devil and the forces of hell.

Jesus' coming brought rejoicing by angels, shepherds, and eventually, the wise men. All of Heaven rejoiced over the coming of Immanuel!

Jesus' coming was in the midst of the quietness of night and it was in that still night in that small town that all of Heaven spoke LOUDLY!

Jesus' coming brought delight to His Father because it was in His coming that you and I can be in the family of God!

But notice in vs. 17 — God did these things over “you.” Now I know “you” is for God's people but hear me out. Because of Jesus our God is a Warrior, Rejoicer, Quieter, and Delighter in you and me! Let that sink in. Often times I fight for, delight in, rejoice over, and find quiet, peace and rest in things that are not of God and yet God finds or does those things for me.

At the birth of the Lord Jesus the door was opened, by God's grace, for you and I to receive ALL that God is through that little Baby who became the Redeeming Lion of Judah! And because He fights for, rejoices over, quiets, and delights in us through Jesus - one day we will be gathered to His throne, we will see His face, we will see His scars, and ALL will be well! Even so come, Lord Jesus!

PRAYER RESPONSE

Thank you Father, that You, through the birth of your Son, display to me that You have fought for me, rejoice over me, quiet me, and delight in me. Thank you that these truths are nothing I can earn but they are gifted to me because of Immanuel!

Amen

GOD'S PERFECT PLAN

READ: JOHN 3:16-17

THE PASSAGE FOR TODAY'S ADVENT THOUGHT IS JOHN 3:16-17. John 3:16 is the perfect expression of God's love!

John identifies the object of God's love — the world. God didn't wait for the world to turn to Him before He loved them, instead He expressed His perfect love through the gift of His Son. Out of this perfect love, God gave His “only begotten Son.” God did something about the plight of His fallen creation.

The recipient of this amazing love is anyone who believes in Jesus. Belief is trusting in, relying on, or clinging to Jesus. The intention of God's amazing love is that anyone who believes should not perish. To perish means to experience eternal destruction and separation from God. This is our destiny without Christ and so God extends salvation through the gift of His Son. The duration of God's love is eternal. Anyone who believes, will experience God's love for all eternity.

John 3:17 reveals the heart of God.

God, the Father, sent God, the Son, to bring salvation — rescue, hope, and healing — to the world!

The Thread of Christmas culminates in the heart of God. He sent His one-and-only Son that we might believe, not perish, and have eternal life.

PRAYER RESPONSE

Father, thank you for Jesus, our Redeemer who provides rescue, hope, and healing.

Amen

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