

CVCONLINE.ORG/ADVENT22



Family Advent 2022



Table of Contents

DAY 1 - God is the Creator of Very Good Things	1
DAY 2 - People Brought Sin into the World	3
DAY 3 - People Need to be Rescued	4
DAY 4 - God Gave the Hope of a Rescuer	6
DAY 5 - What Would the Rescuer Be Like? A Blessing	8
DAY 6 - What Would the Rescuer Be Like? A Light	10
DAY 7 - What Would the Rescuer Be Like? A King	11
DAY 8 - What Would the Rescuer Be Like? A Lamb	13
DAY 9 - What Would the Rescuer Be Like? A Bringer of Good News	15
DAY 10 - What Would the Rescuer Be Like? God With Us	17
DAY 11 - Jesus is a Real Person	19
DAY 12 - Jesus' Birth is the Fulfillment of Prophecy	21
DAY 13 - Jesus' Conception was Supernatural	23
DAY 14 - Jesus Came Humbly	24
DAY 15 - The News of Jesus Came to Normal People	26
DAY 16 - The Fear of the Lord	28
DAY 17 - Jesus' News is for All People	30
DAY 18 - Jesus Came to Save	32
DAY 19 - Jesus' Incarnation is Reason for Celebration	33
DAY 20 - Finding Jesus is not Difficult	35
DAY 21 - Jesus Causes Us to Slow Down	37
DAY 22 - Jesus' Story Should Be Pondered	39
DAY 23 - Jesus' Story Should Be Shared	41
DAY 24 - Jesus is Named "Jesus" for a Reason	43
DAY 25 - Joyfully Celebrate That Our Rescuer Came	45

DAY 1

God is the Creator of Very Good Things



BY RAQUEL SCHORS, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, CVCKIDS

Christmas. Just mention the word, and your mind is flooded with thoughts of jingle bells and the scent of pine, brightly wrapped presents, warm gingerbread, and heavenly choirs. You might even get a cozy feeling in your heart. People call it the most wonderful time of the year, and it is wonderful. The weeks leading to December 25th are filled with delightful anticipation. We know something very good is coming. We are excited for the arrival of Christmas morning.

Of course, all that happy waiting is a picture of something bigger, something more important. It's a picture of how the world waited for a Rescuer to arrive. You've probably heard the story of the very first Christmas - the night that Jesus our Rescuer was born - but to truly understand the joy of His arrival, we must go further back in time. In fact, we must start at the very beginning.

READ GENESIS 1:1, 1:26-31

These passages, from the very first chapter of Genesis, set the scene. God flexed His incomparable creativity to design the world and everything in it, not to mention the universe in which the world was placed. It was all quite magnificent. Forests! Mountains! Seas! Planets! Galaxies! And the crowning jewel of God's incredible creation were two human beings, a man and a woman named Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve lived in a version of our world that was unlike anything we have experienced. That's because the world started out as a perfect place. Nothing was broken. No one was sad. Everything was very good. And that isn't surprising at all because God is the Creator of very good things. In fact, He is the picture of goodness itself, and every good thing comes from Him. So, at the start of the world, Adam and Eve experienced a beautiful, untarnished relationship with God. They had a place to call home, a purpose for their lives, and perfect peace with their Creator...which makes what happened next all the more devastating. It seems unthinkable, but not too long after they were formed, Adam and Eve, and then all of humanity, would be in desperate need of a Rescuer. They would be longing for the Earth to be restored to how it was in the beginning. They wouldn't know the word Christmas, but they would be anxiously waiting for it.

DAY 1

God is the Creator of Very Good Things



BY RAQUEL SCHORS, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, CVCKIDS

You might have a bit of a gnawing feeling inside when you consider how good everything was and compare it to all the problems that exist in the world today. You wouldn't be alone. All of us long for the perfect Earth that God originally created and a perfect relationship with our Creator. But instead of becoming overwhelmed with feelings of sadness or despair at just how bad things are, lean into the longing in a different way. Let your longing for what **was** turn into joyful anticipation for what God **will** do. Remember that God is the Creator of very good things because **He is good!** And a God who is that good won't let things stay a mess forever. In fact, one day He'll make everything even better than it was in the beginning.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What very good thing do you long for, and what broken thing do you wish would go away forever?

PRAYER PROMPT

Take some time to praise God, the Creator of very good things. Then, express your longing for all the world to be restored to perfection, without evil or sin or death. Finally, communicate to God your longing for Him and His goodness.

DAY 2

People Brought Sin into the World

BY PASTOR DALE PISCURA, DIRECTOR OF MEN'S MINISTRY

Hundreds of years ago travelers carried more than their possessions as they left one continent and went to another. They often carried unknown diseases that they would bring along with them. The residents in the new lands had no defense against these viruses and everyone would suffer.

What does this have to do with Christmas, you might ask? Christmas is the time when we celebrate Jesus, God the Son, coming to earth. But today we're going to look at the reason why he needed to come to earth. In the same way that travelers brought disease to the places where they traveled, Adam and Eve brought sin into our world – infecting all of humankind with it. Their fall became the fall of the entire human race for all generations. Sin spread to everyone that was ever born, except One Person – Jesus.

READ GENESIS 3:1-8

Adam and Eve were tempted, desiring to be like God. Through their disobedience, they were separated from God and His nearness. As parents of humanity, they passed along this sinful nature. There was no cure for this condition of the human heart. All people were in danger. The rescue of rebellious people and the restoration of a relationship with a Holy God seemed impossible. But then came Christmas!! God's perfect solution. He sent God the Son, Jesus, to the earth to live the life that you and I could never live (a perfect life), to die the death that we deserve, and to rise from the grave to prove his power over sin – giving us a new life both now and for eternity.

But this gift of forgiveness and eternal life is not for everyone – it is only for those who trust Jesus Christ to be the leader and forgiver of their lives. Maybe today you recognize that you've been infected by sin and that you need a way to be forgiven and for your relationship with God to be restored. Would you trust Jesus to forgive you and lead your life today?

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Why was Jesus the only one who could provide the cure for sin?

PRAYER PROMPT

1. If you have not trusted Jesus yet, maybe you could invite him into your life today.
2. Think of the sins that Jesus has saved you from and pray a prayer of thanksgiving.

DAY 3

People Need to Be Rescued

BY PASTOR CHAD ALLEN, LEAD PASTOR

I was 12. It was my first official job. The sweet elderly Italian lady down the street had hired me once a week to come and pull weeds out of her field. I showed up on my first day with new leather gloves, a couple of garden tools, and a “let’s go!” attitude. As I stepped through the wooden fence beams into her field and stood in her pasture, it hit me just how big three acres actually were. But no matter, I started attacking all the weeds before me, hacking, pulling, ripping, and stacking weeds for what seemed like an hour. Then I looked up and realized I had only gone maybe ten feet. On top of that, my tennis shoes were covered in mud and some of the thorns were getting through my pants, shirt, and gloves. I still came back week after week, and was making slow progress, until I looked back and realized that new weeds were growing up in the areas I had already cleared! At that moment, I realized just how over my head I was. There was NO way I was going to be able to actually pull all these weeds! I felt stuck and defeated.

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever felt overwhelmed, defeated, discouraged, and stuck? We all have! It’s a commonly shared human experience. But why? It’s the outcome of disobedience; part of the effects of the fall of our ancient ancestors, the original man and woman created by God. And because of their rebellion against God, humanity now has to suffer the effects of the fall with a dismal future in store for us. Everyone is born spiritually stuck.

READ GENESIS 3:17-19

The fall of humanity negatively impacted everything, including what we work at. Studying is hard work. Yard work is hard work. Our jobs are hard work. Trying to have money to give away generously, and to save, all while making enough to buy food, clothes, and pay the bills is... yes, hard work! All the resistance we feel in life, that “stuck” feeling we experience, is because of the fall of Adam and Eve. And it increases that deep longing to be freed, to be rescued.

DAY 3

People Need to Be Rescued

BY PASTOR CHAD ALLEN, LEAD PASTOR

One day, Ms. Caselle's relative showed up at that field I was working on. He had a tractor. In about an hour, the whole field had been tilled, and not a weed was in sight! Someone showed up that day with the ability to do what I could never do on my own. I was so relieved. Humanity is stuck in sin, growing up all around us, and we have no ability to work it off or take care of it ourselves. Christmas is a time to remember that God sent His Son to rescue us, to do for us what we could never do on our own.

So when you feel overwhelmed, discouraged, and defeated, remember how we all got here. But more importantly, remember how God has shown up, what He has done to rescue us from our sinful and spiritually stuck situation, and how one day, all the resistance, all the discouragement, and all the effects of sin will be gone. That's a thought and reminder that gives us hope, peace, and strength to keep going.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What challenging or discouraging experience are you going through, and how does Christ coming to rescue us give you hope in the midst of it?

PRAYER PROMPT

Humbly come to God in prayer, share with Him what is discouraging you and what is overwhelming you. Let Him know, that you know, it is because of sin and of the fall. Thank Him for Jesus, who came to rescue you from sin and who will one day fully rescue us from all that hurts and discourages. Ask Him to help you walk in hope, peace, and strength because Jesus came, lived, died, rose, and is with you.

DAY 4

God Gave the Hope of a Rescuer

BY GINA FLOWER, ADMIN ASSISTANT, SERVE TEAM

My daughter was not quite two years old and wanted desperately to play with an older sibling's toy that was unsafe for her age. As any loving parent would do to keep their child safe from harm, I took the toy and placed it well out of her reach. I brought out something better for her that I knew she would love but she wouldn't even take her eyes off of the forbidden toy. She was angry at me and insistent on having the one thing that was not good for her even though I had something so much better to give her. That's when God reminded me that I/we are just like that with Him, our loving Heavenly Father. We insist on having things that are not good for us instead of trusting that God has the absolute best for us.

Mankind has been that way from the very beginning of time. In Genesis, we read that Adam and Eve were deceived by the serpent. Instead of trusting God's best for them, they decided they wanted what He said they could not have. They **CHOSE** to disobey God and because of that, just like with all sin, there were serious consequences. They felt the weight of their guilt and wanted to hide from God. But God, in His love, wouldn't let them hide.

READ GENESIS 3:13-15

As God approached Adam and Eve after their rebellion, God asked Eve, "What have you done?" It's important to realize that God knows all. He wasn't asking Eve that question because He didn't know what she had done. In fact, He knew exactly what had taken place. But in His lovingkindness, He truly cares about our relationship with Him. Rather than letting us make a bad decision and hide in shame, He immediately draws attention to it and draws us to Himself.

The phrase at the end of this short passage can be easily understood. But it's vital that we bring clarity to what God is saying. In verse 15 God tells the serpent that there will be a lifelong battle between him and humanity. The devil will land a few punches, but in the end, one of Eve's descendants will crush the head of the snake – defeat him once and for all!

Consequences of our sinful choices are very real and never good. So in His great love for us, God gave the **HOPE** of a rescuer. Already in verse 15, God is declaring that we will have victory. The rest of Scripture from Genesis on is the story of how this is all unfolding – Jesus defeating sin and death, the ultimate victory!

DAY 4

God Gave the Hope of a Rescuer



BY GINA FLOWER, ADMIN ASSISTANT, SERVE TEAM

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Where do you see evidence of the consequences of our sin in the world? In your relationships?

PRAYER PROMPT

Take the time to thank God for providing the HOPE of Jesus, who made it so that the outcome of our sin isn't death as it should be, but the gift of eternal life when we place our trust in Him!

DAY 5

What Would the Rescuer Be Like? A Blessing.

BY PASTOR RICK EIMERS, SEND PASTOR

Broken promises. If you just read those two words, it is safe to say that you have likely felt the sting coming from the pain of these difficult words. Some have experienced it over a fractured marriage or the betrayal of a good friend. The longer you live, the more likely it is that you will know this kind of pain. It is possible that thoughts of Christmas bring you sadness more than joy because it is a reminder of the pain you have felt or experienced in the recent past.

Let this Christmas be a reminder to you that God never breaks His promises. In fact, the purpose and mission that He is unfolding before mankind is a covenant that we can count on - and one that we can fully believe in. We don't use that Word a lot - covenant. A covenant is an agreement that a person keeps even when the other person doesn't hold up their end of the deal. God is faithful to His Covenant because He is God. Even when we mess up, He is always faithful! His Covenant with man was initiated with Abraham in Genesis 12 and culminated in the birth, life, death, resurrection, and imminent return of Jesus.

READ GENESIS 12:1-3

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."

In this text, we see the beginnings of God's plan to crush the head of the serpent - to defeat evil once-and-for-all. God made a covenant with Abram - and this promise is key to understanding God's plan. God made the promise, has been keeping the promise, and will continue to be faithful to the promise for the rest of time. God chose one man and his family to bless all the nations of this earth when He promised land, a huge multi-generational family (seed), and blessing.

First, the land. God said to Abraham: "Lift your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see I will give to you and your descendants forever."

DAY 5

What Would the Rescuer Be Like? A Blessing.

BY PASTOR RICK EIMERS, SEND PASTOR

Secondly, God promised descendants: “Look heavenward and count the stars.” Can you imagine that task? “1, 2, 3, 77, 87, 99, 201...” He knew this would be an impossible task. Then God said to him: “So shall your descendants be.”

Thirdly, God promised blessing. “I will bless you...I will establish my covenant between you and me and your descendants after you...for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you and I will be their God.”

God started with this small family and then – guess who was one of Abraham's descendants? That's right – Jesus! The one who would grow God's family into the most massive family that the world has ever seen. God always keeps His promises.

This Advent season, in the midst of all the hustle and bustle, take a moment to reflect on the fact that we have a God who is faithful to His promises - no matter what kind of broken promises we've experienced in the past.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

How does God's relentless faithfulness influence how you view our Advent season?

PRAYER PROMPT

Take a moment to thank God for being faithful to His promises - even when we are not.

DAY 6

What Would the Rescuer Be Like? A Light.

BY DENISE PETEK, DIRECTOR OF CVCKIDS

Tis the Season... The lights, the decorations, the finding of the perfect gift, the gathering of family, and of course the Christmas cookies. My favorite memory as a child was decorating the tree with my Dad, especially the moment when we put the angel on top of the tree, turned off the lights, and the grand finale of putting the plug into the socket. I still smile thinking about the tree lit in all its glory. As a Mom, this picture was quite different. The chaos of bringing out all the decorations, oh the mess that was made, but the fun that was had. At the end of the day, while all my babies were asleep in their beds and the mess was put away, I would sit quietly in the darkened family room and enjoy the peace as I looked at the lighted tree. No matter your age, lights in darkness have a way of restoring peace.

Of course, all of the stuff I mention above is not the reason we celebrate Christmas. Christmas is about the greatest gift ever given, Jesus, God's son, and our Savior. Jesus came as a baby into a dark world filled with sin, to light the way to our redemption and to restore our peace with God.

READ ISAIAH 9:2

Light shows the reality of what you cannot see in darkness. Even the tiniest of lights can break through and expose the truth. Jesus is the great light who humbly came into a sinful world to show us the way to God and to fulfill God's plan for our salvation through His death on the cross. A relationship with God through Jesus also lights (exposes) our darkness (the sin in our lives) and our need for a savior, and stokes our desire to let His light within us shine in the world around us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How does the knowledge of Jesus as the light change the way you will celebrate Christmas this year?

Read Matthew 5:16. Whom do you know that you can let your light shine and show them the way to God through Jesus this Christmas?

PRAYER PROMPT

As a family, gather around your lit Christmas tree or a lit candle if you don't have a tree and turn off the lights. Each of you, thank God for sending Jesus to light our way. Worship the light of the world by singing "Here I am To Worship" together. Below is the audio and lyrics.

[Video](#)

[Lyrics](#)

DAY 7

What Would the Rescuer Be Like? A King.

BY JACK HOPKINS, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, CVCYOUTH

When you think of a king, what do you think of? Do you think of big crowns, long robes, golden jewelry, big elaborate rooms, lots of money, and lots of servants to help with anything and everything? Or do you think of a child, born in a barn into poverty, in a feeding trough, wrapped in dirty clothes?

Jesus was not the king that people were expecting. He did not come to take the throne, didn't wear a big crown of gold, or have lots of money. He did not come to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:45). He came to be our rescuer.

Our passage in Isaiah prophesies about Jesus' coming to earth as a child, but not just as a child, as a king.

READ ISAIAH 9:6

What does it mean for the "government to be on his shoulders?" That's weird, right?! We're not going to get too far into the weeds today, but suffice it to say that what is meant here is that dominion, power, and authority will be given to Jesus. The Hebrew literally says, "the princely rule has been set on his shoulders."

When Jesus came into the world, most people thought that the Messiah would be a political ruler. But Jesus came to introduce a different type of Kingdom – a kingdom of servanthood and love. But, make no mistake – he IS the king and he will return one day to rule and reign. Every knee will bow in submission to King Jesus.

But the book of Philippians tells us that the reason why Jesus has been given the name that is above every name is because of his humble sacrifice. Jesus has taken the power and penalty of sin on his own shoulders. He lived the life we could never live, a perfect life, and then died the death that we deserved to die. Because of this sacrifice, we are able to live with King Jesus for eternity, who reigns forever.

DAY 7

What Would the Rescuer Be Like? A King.



BY JACK HOPKINS, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, CVCYOUTH

In response, Jesus will be called the following names: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.

The rescuer that Christmas brings is a King. Not the king that many were expecting, but the best king we could ask for. But he is so much more than that. There are over 180 different names or titles for Jesus in the Bible, all of which cover a different part of Jesus' character. Today, we want to reflect on the character of our rescuer, King Jesus.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Talk about why the names of the Messiah in Isaiah 9:6 are important. What do they communicate about who Jesus is and how we should respond to him?

PRAYER PROMPT

Reflect on the names of God and praise Him for who He is.

DAY 8

What Would the Rescuer Be Like? A Lamb.

BY TRACI SCHIMPF, ADMIN ASSISTANT, COMMUNITY LIFE

The names of God give us important information about who God is. So do the names of Jesus. Lambs represent gentleness, purity, and innocence. They were the closest animal in the time and culture of the Israelites that represented a creature that was free from blemishes. Though the phrase "Lamb of God" is one of the most tender images of Christ in the New Testament, it may have also brought forth a more uncomfortable picture to those who heard John the Baptist hail Jesus with these words. Many of them, at one time or another, had carried one of their own lambs to the altar to be slaughtered as a sacrifice for their sins. A lamb they had fed and cared for...the best lamb of their flock. This picture provided a very vivid image of the consequences for those who violated the law of Moses when he applied the phrase "Lamb of God" to a living man.

Animal sacrifices are found all throughout the books of the Old Testament. The purpose of animal sacrifices and offerings was to cover over sin and experience forgiveness. Under the law, the people knew if sin was present, a sacrifice was necessary for redemption. In the Jewish culture, many of these sacrifices often involved lambs. Can you begin to see why Jesus was called the Lamb of God?

READ ISAIAH 53:4-7

The law of Moses was unable to save us because of our sinful nature. The sacrifices of the Old Testament were a temporary covering of sin, but sin still ruled in people's hearts, and they committed sin over and over again. God knew we needed a rescuer, so He did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body, God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as the perfect sacrifice. And just like the lambs that were sacrificed for sin, Christ would also be sacrificed for our sake.

Jesus bore rejection and ridicule on our account. He received scoffing and shame in our place. He was falsely accused and unjustly condemned to death knowing that the sacrifice of His sinless life was the only way that sinners who were justly condemned and deserved God's wrath could be forgiven and receive forgiveness for their sins. Jesus, the "Lamb of God," was our once and for all sacrifice that fulfilled God's need for a blood offering. He was the sacrifice of love that brought the possibility of change to the world. Our pardon for sin was secured and everlasting life is the free gift for all who believe in His holy name.

DAY 8

What Would the Rescuer Be Like? A Lamb.

BY TRACI SCHIMPF, ADMIN ASSISTANT, COMMUNITY LIFE

Do you feel sin has a powerful hold on your life...that you will never be free of the consequences of sin and shame? There is hope! The "Lamb of God" rescued us! We are completely freed from the guilt and punishment of our sins as we look to Jesus and see that He made the payment for every last sin. God accepted that payment and declares us "not guilty." That is freedom in Christ!

DISCUSSION QUESTION

We often forget to give thanks for all of the blessings that the Lord has given us, especially the new life we get through the sacrifice of the perfect lamb, Jesus. What are some things you are thankful for this Christmas season?

PRAYER PROMPT

Praise God for sending His son Jesus, the perfect, unblemished "Lamb of God" whose perfect sacrifice frees those who believe in His holy name for eternity!

DAY 9

What Would the Rescuer Be Like? A Bringer of Good News.



BY PASTOR DEAN SILEY, PASTOR OF CARE & COUNSELING

The Christmas season can be filled with so much excitement and expectation. We look forward to time with family and friends, especially those that we do not see often enough. We enjoy the time away from our busy schedules and school. But Christmas can also bring great sadness, loneliness, and pain. We grieve over lost loved ones no longer with us at the table or broken relationships between family and friends. It can also be a time of great contemplation over our lives.

I did not grow up in a Christian home. As a child, I would enjoy all the festivities of Christmas but would often feel empty after it was over. These family traditions and presents would only do so much to fill my heart. I wondered if this was really all that there was to look forward to in life. It was confusing and I longed for more but felt empty, sad, and hurting. I did not know what my heart needed until friends at school began to tell me about the true meaning of Christmas. These classmates brought me the "Good News" of Jesus.

When we are brokenhearted, we are sad, hurting, and at times crushed in spirit. Our hearts desperately long for "Good News." We cry out for something or someone to instill confidence, give hope, and the courage to continue. The prophet Isaiah here in this text is announcing the "Good News" of God's plan of restoration and hope for His people.

READ ISAIAH 61:1

This "Good News" is a spiritual restoration and healing. As God begins the process of salvation in the hearts of His people, we quickly realize the predicament of our sin...that we were far from God and that our sin separated us from God. We all fall short of being with God in His glory. As God grants us repentance, we begin to see our sin. Conviction and sorrow fall heavy on our hearts. We become brokenhearted, captive as a prisoner with no hope. But Jesus changed that! In the book of Luke, Jesus ends up reading that passage from Isaiah.

READ LUKE 4:17-21

DAY 9

What Would the Rescuer Be Like? God With Us.

BY PASTOR DEAN SILEY, PASTOR OF CARE & COUNSELING

Hallelujah! Because of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, our sin can be washed white as snow. This "Good News" brings comfort to the brokenhearted and sets the captive free. This is the work only our Lord and Savior can do in the souls of men and women.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

This Advent season, do you feel brokenhearted and captive? What are the feelings you have about your circumstances? Remember - you are not alone! We have a savior in Jesus who can bind up the brokenhearted bringing "Good News" of comfort.

PRAYER PROMPT

Lord Jesus, we are so thankful that you have fulfilled this promise in Isaiah this very day. Help us to trust in you alone when we are sad, hurting and brokenhearted. We look to you when we are crushed in spirit, that daily we would be reminded of the "Good News" that we have in you, Jesus. Amen!

DAY 10

What Would the Rescuer Be Like? God With Us.

BY DAHLIA ORTH, ADMIN ASSISTANT, EQUIP TEAM

Who is your best friend? Why are they your best friend? What do you love most about them? One of the reasons I love my closest friends is because they "get me" as a person. They understand who I am at my core, they know how to love me well, and I genuinely enjoy spending a lot of time with them.

Do you ever wonder if God ACTUALLY understands what it's like to live in this world? Does God "get us"? What about the difficulties we face or even the joy that we can experience here on earth? And what about all the in-between moments? Anger, fear, happiness, etc.? Does He truly understand all that we go through here on earth? Can he relate to me in a deep and personal way like my best friends can?

In today's text, we see the word, "Immanuel" which means "God with us." Not only is Jesus with us all the time, but we can relate to Him because He did indeed come down to this earth as a baby and experienced all that we experience as humans. He grew up and knew what it was like to be hungry, thirsty, tired, weak, happy, sad, and more. We can't say that God doesn't understand what it's like because He truly does. That's what makes Him relatable because Jesus came down and was fully God and fully man. He came down to this earth and embraced being a man in full so He could save us all.

READ ISAIAH 7:14

Jesus is Immanuel, which means God is with us. Fully God, fully man. Jesus walked on this very earth that you and I walk on. You can even go to Israel and see the very sea that Jesus walked on and the towns that He lived and taught in. Jesus is a very real person that understands our lives in a very real way.

Is your mind blown yet? Mine too, but I take comfort in knowing that Jesus genuinely "gets" every fear, difficulty, temptation, and more in this world. That's what makes Him so relatable and why we can know with certainty that God is indeed with us. The Christmas season reminds me of the miraculous work of God in sending Jesus to this earth and leaves me in awe and wonder.

DAY 10

What Would the Rescuer Be Like? A Bringer of Good News.



BY DAHLIA ORTH, ADMIN ASSISTANT, EQUIP TEAM

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Do you find God to be relatable? If not, why not? What do you enjoy most about spending time with Him?

PRAYER PROMPT

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus to earth as a baby to save us all so we can have relationship with Him. We can thank God for always being with us and trust in the truth that He understands everything we experience here on earth.

DAY 11

Jesus is a Real Person

BY PASTOR NATE GREEN, WORSHIP ARTS PASTOR

Have you ever had to move? Moving physical locations is highly disruptive. Especially if the move requires a job change, school change, or church change. In many ways, it's like starting over again. You have to build new relationships and get used to a new environment. Growing up as a missionary kid we moved a lot. In many ways, I was along for the ride as my parents tried to stay in step with where God was leading them to share the gospel.

Jesus was born into a very disruptive environment. Augustus, the Roman emperor at the time of Jesus' birth, ordered everyone in the Roman empire to return to their ancestral towns to register for a census. Mary and Joseph did not have a choice in the matter. Mary was in her final trimester of pregnancy (ladies you know what that's like) and they had to travel 90 miles to Bethlehem. This was way before cars and highways were a thing. Mary had to ride on a donkey (probably hoping that she wouldn't begin childbirth on the journey) while Joseph walked. It would be like traveling from Cleveland to Toledo, only instead of being on I-80, you would be walking through a desert landscape with multiple hills and valleys to traverse.

One of the most thorough, historical accounts of Jesus' birth is told by a man named Luke. Let's turn to Luke's gospel and start at the beginning of chapter 2.

READ LUKE 2:1-3

Jesus being born in Bethlehem was a fulfillment of prophecy (see Micah 5:2). That means that God had told people about Jesus hundreds of years before he actually came to earth. When Luke begins his narrative, we might expect it to start with something more exciting. But, it starts with some boring, basic facts – there's a census – counting people. What does this have to do with anything? This story reminds me that Jesus was a real person from a real family born at a specific time in history. And, part of being human is the fact that life is difficult. Mary and Joseph were really young and were chosen by God to be a part of something incredible. They didn't fully understand all of the details, but they were submissive to God's story and design for them. So often in our humanness we want to know all of the details instead of trusting God's good plan. But we don't need to understand the full picture in order to be obedient. We can trust that when we obey He will be faithful to do far more than we can ever ask or imagine. And, one day we'll see the fruit of being obedient.



DAY 11
**Jesus is a
Real Person**

BY PASTOR NATE GREEN, WORSHIP ARTS PASTOR

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Have you ever had to do something difficult that wasn't really your choice but it was the right thing to do?

PRAYER PROMPT

Lord God, sometimes you ask us to do really difficult things. Thanks for the reminder that you do good things in the midst of difficult things and that we don't always need to understand why, but we can trust Your plan and purpose.

DAY 12

Jesus' Birth is the Fulfillment of Prophecy



BY PASTOR CHAD ALLEN, LEAD PASTOR

When I was a kid, and before I knew Jesus, I went through a season where I found myself drawn to horoscopes - where you find your “sign” as determined by the position of the stars and planets when you were born and then can predict your future by what the horoscope said each day. So, I would open the paper when it came to my house, find the horoscope section, and read it to find out what I should expect based on what the horoscope predicted. Looking back now, I see how lame and immature it was to look to the stars and planets to try and tell me the future when in reality, the future of all things is held by the very One who made the stars and planets! And not only that, God has already given us glimpses into the future in His Word. These are called “Prophecies.”

Have you ever been curious about what the future holds? Have you ever been fascinated by the foretelling of events and then they came true? This is the nature of prophecy, and God loaded up the Bible with prophecies. Over 25% of the Bible is actually prophecy! And many of the Bible prophecies are about Jesus, the Savior of the world. There are an estimated 450-570 prophecies related to Jesus in the Bible, and Jesus fulfilled over 300 prophecies in His birth, life, death, and resurrection.

READ LUKE 2:4-5, 1 SAMUEL 16:1

If you are familiar with the story of Christ’s birth, then you have read or heard the verses you just read in Luke 2 many times. But often when we read verses in the Bible, especially if they are familiar to us, we miss some of the deeper meaning and messages that are in those verses. For example, in Luke 2 we see Joseph and Mary make the trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem because Joseph was an ancestor of David. What we miss is the connection to 1 Samuel 16:1 where hundreds of years before this moment, God had appointed a new king who would be anointed in Bethlehem to rule His people. This is an “allusion,” a micro-prophecy that one day again, in the future, God would provide a new King who would be anointed to rule His people, someone to be an ancestor of King David. We now know that this is a reference to Jesus. You can see other prophetic references in the Bible to Jesus being born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) and being related to David (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5-6).

DAY 12

Jesus' Birth is the Fulfillment of Prophecy



BY PASTOR CHAD ALLEN, LEAD PASTOR

So why does God give us prophecies like this? It is so we can believe with confidence in what God has said, what God has planned, and in Whom God has sent. God gave us history in advance to prove that Jesus is the “Messiah,” God’s forever-anointed Savior and King. No other religious leader has prophecies that foretell their birth, life, death, or any other detail of their existence, only Jesus! Prophecy is a way that God gives a stamp of proof on what we believe.

So the next time you have doubts about Jesus - about His miraculous birth, perfect life, sacrificial death, supernatural resurrection, or His promised return - remember prophecy. The next time someone wants to know more about why you believe in Jesus, share with them all the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled, which is a mathematical impossibility. Remember God telling us in advance about Jesus so that it would increase our faith and belief. As we gather this season and celebrate the birth of Jesus, let us marvel at His coming to earth. Let us rejoice in His appearance to humanity, and let us stand with confidence that He truly is God’s sent Savior who’s coming again... as He prophesied and promised!

DISCUSSION QUESTION

How does understanding that Jesus’s coming fulfilled prophecy help you believe in Him with more confidence?

PRAYER PROMPT

Humbly come before God praising and thanking Him for providing supernatural clues and prophecy to help us believe in Jesus. Confess times that you have doubted Him, and ask God to bring to your mind how Jesus fulfilled prophecy in order to strengthen your faith.

DAY 13

Jesus' Conception is Supernatural

BY CHIP BELL, ELDER

When we read the Old Testament, we see many things God did which were supernatural. Supernatural means beyond the scope of normal, everyday things that people can do. Some examples of God's supernatural acts would be the Creation of the World, the Flood, Sarah's conception of Isaac at 90 years old, the parting of the Red Sea, Elijah taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire, and I could go on and on.

In today's reading, we see THE MOST supernatural thing God would have done to date - The Word (Jesus) is conceived in the womb of a virgin woman, not according to natural means, but supernatural means - through the Holy Spirit, and what was conceived in Mary would once and for all bring light in a dark world and reconciliation to mankind.

READ LUKE 1:35-38, 2:5

So the Spirit of God would overshadow Mary and bring life into her similar to how the Spirit of God hovered over the deep just prior to the dawn of creation. And on Day 1, God said "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:2-3). This time, what was conceived in Mary would be the Light of the World and whoever followed HIM would no longer walk in darkness, but have the Light of life.

As you look back at the passage you can see what the angel shared with Mary was not a command, but a message from God. It required a response from Mary! In that response, we see her faith in God and consent - to be the Lord's servant and to allow all that was said to occur. Now the hard part starts, Mary needs to tell Joseph, her fiancé, she is pregnant. But God is faithful and tells Joseph that the baby now growing inside of Mary was actually supernaturally put there by the Holy Spirit and not to be afraid to marry her. And they travel to Bethlehem together where Jesus, the Light of the World would be born.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Verse 37 reads "For the word of God will never fail" and reminds us that nothing will be impossible for God. If he says it, it will happen! As you face day to day trials and challenges, what promise(s) of God in the Bible do you need to cling to?

PRAYER PROMPT

Go to the Bible and find the verse(s). Write them down. Read and think deeply and carefully about the promise that you are trusting God for, remembering His Word will never fail. Personalize it and pray it back to Him in faith, waiting, and walking in obedience to Him. God can and does work in Supernatural ways!

DAY 14

Jesus Came Humbly

BY LISA RICHARDSON, ADMIN ASSISTANT, NEXT GEN

Have you ever planned a big event or birthday party? I work at CVC as an admin assistant to the youth and young adult teams. One of my jobs here is helping to plan and execute events for these departments. There are a lot of details that go into planning events to make sure that the event is fun, that people are fed, and that everyone is safe. It is also vital to communicate well with parents and set leaders up for success.

Let's imagine for a second there was an event planner up in heaven. And the event planner's job was to make Jesus' entrance into the world THE BEST! How would you plan that grand entrance? What would the party be like? What kind of budget would you need?

Would it have been your plan for Jesus to be born in a barn – into a feeding trough?

I mean if I was planning this birth, at the very minimum I would have freed up a hotel room for them! Shouldn't this be the most lavish event of all time? Did the event planner mess something up?

Over the past few days, we've seen that Jesus came to this earth as a human. And Pastor Chad taught us about the fact that Jesus' birth was to fulfill prophecy. Yesterday we saw that Jesus' birth was supernatural. All of those things seem to demand a MASSIVE entry into the world. But Jesus came humbly.

READ LUKE 2:1-7

Wow, right?! No fanfare, no parade, no feast – not even a room in the local inn. A barn and a feeding trough. This is the first moment of many moments where we see the humble heart of Jesus. He lived a very simple life. During his time in public ministry, he was regularly homeless. He humbled himself all the way to the point of death – he couldn't get any lower!

Jesus sets such a beautiful example for us. We tend to love ourselves far more than we love other people. We think about ourselves more than we think about others. We can tend to be our own #1 fans. But the Bible calls all people who follow Jesus to follow his example of humility.

DAY 14

Jesus Came Humbly



BY LISA RICHARDSON, ADMIN ASSISTANT, NEXT GEN

Humility doesn't mean to think less of yourself, but to think of yourself less. Jesus spent His life caring for others. His humility was so complete that He was willing to give up His own life in order to save yours. There is no greater example of humility for us to follow this Christmas.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

In what ways can you and your family be purposeful about thinking of others more than yourselves this Christmas?

PRAYER PROMPT

Lord, thank You for coming to earth and giving us an example of a humble lifestyle. I pray that I look for ways to be humble and think of myself less this Christmas season. I pray that I can love others more than myself just as You have done for us.

DAY 15

Jesus Came To Normal People



BY KEVIN LOROW, DIRECTOR OF YOUTH & WORSHIP, CVC BRUNSWICK

Normal. That word kind of feels like an insult, doesn't it? We say people are "basic" to rudely say that they're unexceptional or uninteresting because they're just like everyone else around them. We often use the word normal to describe things that are plain, unimportant, and don't stand out. Those aren't words that people put on their resumes. Being normal is something that most people don't want to be. Sometimes we tend to think that our value and worth are connected to how special or unique we are, and we fearfully wonder if God thinks the same way.

One of the most beautiful things about the Gospel is that it doesn't discriminate based on social status, wealth, gender, ethnicity, age, or the likes. Instead, God is in the habit of using ordinary people to accomplish His extraordinary purposes.

READ LUKE 2:8-9

This passage says that on the night that Jesus was born, there were shepherds out in a field working. They were watching their sheep and minding their own business when BOOM! All of a sudden, an angel of the Lord is there with them, and God's glory is radiating among them. These random shepherds are all of a sudden brought in on the most incredible news – a Savior has been born! For people who lived in Israel at the time, this story would be crazy. Shepherds weren't considered to be important people. They weren't viewed in a positive light, especially those that worked overnight! They were thought of as untrustworthy, they often weren't allowed to give their testimonies in court. They were people who worked with their hands and did a dirty job that most people wouldn't want to do. Shepherds weren't the type of people who'd be invited to big parties. They smelled, (You would be too if you hung out with sheep all day and night!) but they were the welcome party and the announcers of the birth of Jesus.

When it comes to the type of people that one might expect God Almighty to use in one of the most pivotal events in human history, shepherds were not high on that list. God didn't go to the most powerful, learned, trusted, or important people, but instead, He used ordinary people to accomplish His extraordinary purpose!

DAY 15

Jesus Came To Normal People



BY KEVIN LOROW, DIRECTOR OF YOUTH & WORSHIP, CVC BRUNSWICK

As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (ESV). How amazing is it that God doesn’t restrict Himself to the best and brightest of people? He doesn’t need to use the people that the world thinks are impressive or powerful. God desires to use the normal things in the world to show how amazing He is. You’re not too normal or average in God’s eyes to be a part of His incredible plan! That is really good news because it means that He can use absolutely anyone! God hasn’t limited His wonderful work to people based on their job, their ethnicity, or their gender. He uses ordinary people to accomplish His extraordinary purposes!

DISCUSSION QUESTION

How does it make you feel to know that God can use you for extraordinary things?

PRAYER PROMPT

Take some time to consider some of the extraordinary things God has done through ordinary people. Next, ask God to give you the humility to remember that the extraordinary power of the Gospel comes from Him. Lastly, thank Him that you get to be a part of showing how extraordinary God is.

DAY 16

The Fear of the Lord is an Important Part of Christmas



BY BECCA FERGUSON, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY LIFE

Imagine standing on the deck of a ship and looking out at the ocean in every direction, as far as the eye can see. Imagine perching on the peak of the highest mountain, gazing at the earth below you. Imagine sitting in a rocket ship in space, peering down on the entire world and everyone in it out a window. In situations like the ones you just imagined being in, it's easy to contemplate how small we humans are, and how big the world that we inhabit truly is.

When we encounter places, things, and creatures that are magnificent and breathtaking, we experience awe – and sometimes even fear. The awe and fear that we experience when we look at God's creation are just a tiny sliver of the awe and fear that God's people in Scripture are called to have for the Lord of the universe.

In our culture today, fear is usually interpreted as being completely negative. To us, fear is a bad feeling, something that we want to avoid experiencing in life. But God's Word tells us that fearing God is good, right, healthy, and wise.

Psalm 111:10 states, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!"

Psalm 33:8 tells us, "Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!"

Righteous people in Scripture are described as people who feared the Lord. Fear of God in the Bible isn't given as an opposite to loving God – in fact, God's people are commanded to fear Him and love Him at the same time!

Deuteronomy 6:5 states, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

God's people are called throughout Scripture to understand that God is holy and other, different than His people and different than anything in His creation. What is truly remarkable is that this awe-inspiring, fear-inducing God loves the people He created and wants us to know Him. We encounter both of these realities up close when we read the story of Jesus' birth – that God is big and powerful, and overwhelmingly holy – AND, He is loving, and compassionate, and reaches out into human history to draw people into a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ.

DAY 16

The Fear of the Lord is an Important Part of Christmas



BY BECCA FERGUSON, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY LIFE

READ LUKE 2:9

When the shepherds in the field on the night of Jesus' birth encountered an angel of the Lord and saw the glory of the Lord, they experienced the fear of the Lord. When they encountered God's glory, they saw both God and themselves more clearly. They saw God's power, might, and holiness and they also saw their finitude. They saw their weakness and their sin. And in that clarity, they felt both awe and fear before a mighty God.

It's important for us to see and learn from this moment – because, like the shepherds, we are also invited to consider who God is (and who we are) and what this all means for us.

And as we will see as we continue our reading tomorrow and in the coming days, there is good news that comes with encountering God. Good news, of great joy, that will be for all people. But before we can adequately understand God's love, we must first see Him clearly as holy, holy, holy, worthy of our fear and awe, and still, in a marvelous mystery, loving us and wanting us to know and walk with Him.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

When you think about the “fear of the Lord,” what comes to your mind? What does it mean to you that you are called to both fear and love the God who loves you?

PRAYER PROMPT

Pray that the Lord will give you an accurate view of who He is in all His glory, a view that will push you to understand Him, yourself, and His gospel more clearly.

DAY 17

Jesus' News is For All People

BY PASTOR RICK DUNCAN, FOUNDING PASTOR

What do Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, Canada, Ghana, El Salvador, Ukraine, Hungary, and Indonesia have in common? These are all countries I've had the privilege of visiting on mission in my life. Why go to all that trouble and expense? It's because the good news is for "all people." Jesus said in John 16:10, "I have other sheep that are not of this fold."

When an angel announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds in Luke 2:10, he announced that great joy was now available to all people. Don't miss this: The good news is not for some people. It's for "all people."

READ LUKE 2:10

Pastor John Piper has notably said, "Missions exist because worship doesn't." God's goal is that heaven is populated with worshippers – and not just worshippers from a small slice of the world's population. God is forming a kingdom of priests from every tribe and language and people and nation who, in heaven, will sing to Jesus, the Lamb of God, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:9, 12).

It's clear that all people don't appreciate baseball or jazz or brussels sprouts. But when a mountain range or a stretch of beach or a magnificent sunset or a work of art is recognized by all people everywhere as glorious, then the glory of that thing is magnified. Our Lord Jesus is so magnificent that He will one day be proclaimed as worthy – not just a select few – but by "all people."

One of the criticisms sometimes leveled against Christianity is that it is exclusive. It's true. The Bible does say that Jesus is the only way anyone can be made right with God (John 14:6, Acts 4:12). Yet, looked at another way, Christianity is also the most inclusive religion in all the world! Why? Because Jesus is for "all people."

God shows no partiality (Acts 10:34). God is a global God who loves the world (John 3:16). Anyone anywhere can call on the name of the Lord to be saved (Romans 10:13). When the angel announced Jesus' birth, he made sure to proclaim that Jesus is good news for everyone everywhere. So, don't let anyone say that Christianity is "the white man's religion"! Red, yellow, black, and white is all precious in His sight.

DAY 17

Jesus' News is For All People



BY PASTOR RICK DUNCAN, FOUNDING PASTOR

This is why we have been called to go and make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:19). Jesus said, “This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). Since this good news of great joy is for “all people,” then as followers of Jesus we have 3 responsibilities to “all people” of the world: We pray; we give; we go.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

When it comes to playing your part in sharing the gospel with “all people,” how is God calling you to pray? What is God calling you to give? Where is God calling you to go? Which group of people in the world is most on your heart?

PRAYER PROMPT

Pray as Jesus taught us that God’s name would be hallowed by “all people” in all the earth (Matthew 6:9). Pray for specific nations and people groups that Christ would be worshipped as King of the nations, Lord of the peoples, Savior of sinners, and Deliverer of the oppressed. Pray that you will play your part to be someone who prays, gives, and goes so that “all people” would know the good news that brings great joy.

DAY 18

Jesus Came to Save

BY LAURIE WEISER, FACILITY COORDINATOR

We have all had the real-life experience of anticipating and celebrating a new birth! Whether you have had a baby, a grandchild, or a friend, neighbor or coworker had a baby – the excitement is REAL! And when the announcement FINALLY comes, we are excited and happy to hear! And then we begin to tell others – we share the GOOD NEWS! As a matter of fact, when I had all three of my girls, I had announcements ready to mail out, a Facebook message was posted, we handed out chocolates, we printed pictures, and we simply could not stop sharing our wonderful news!

READ LUKE 2:11

Not only is this a birth announcement, but it is also the ultimate birth announcement for all!

It should not fall on deaf ears that Jesus' birth was announced in three ways. Jesus was announced as Savior, Messiah, and Lord. He was announced as Savior – the one who brings salvation. He was announced as Messiah – the anointed one or chosen one. And He is announced as Lord – the holder of authority as verified in Matthew 28:18.

As Christ followers, we should find it easy to announce this birth to the World around us, especially at this time of the year. We should be sending out announcements (maybe a Christmas greeting sharing this news?! We should be posting the good news in any place we can (possibly a Facebook post linking a devotional?! We should be telling others the GOOD NEWS of this exciting birth that we celebrate every year! We should be just as happy, proud, excited, and intentional about sharing the birth of Jesus - the Savior, the Messiah, the Lord - with others as we would be if it were our own child because this birth is more significant than any other! This is a way we can reclaim Christmas as the life-changing holiday it was intended to be.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

How will YOU share? From the young to the not-so-young anymore, we can ALL make the decision to intentionally share the GOOD NEWS of the coming of Jesus for everyone we know to hear.

PRAYER PROMPT

Pray about how the Lord is leading you to share this wonderful announcement this Christmas season!

Jesus' Incarnation is Reason for Celebration

BY KATHY NEMEC, ADMIN ASSISTANT, CVC BRUNSWICK

READ LUKE 2:8-9

It may have been an ordinary night for the shepherds. As they tended their sheep in the darkness, who would have imagined that they would be startled by an angel surrounded by the resplendent light of God's glory? Surely, they weren't expecting the darkness to be shattered, or anticipating the good news the angel came to announce. The surprise and fear that they experienced may have evolved into jaw-dropping awe as they witnessed a massive army of angels celebrating God's glory.

What was it that caused the angels to bring the heavenly celebration to earth in such a glorious display? It was an event that changed human history forever and ushered in a new reality: a Savior, Christ the Lord had been born! God Himself came to dwell among humanity to bring salvation, reconciliation with God, and peace to mankind.

Years later, the apostle Paul wrote that Christ is "the image of the invisible God," and that "in him (Christ) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:15, 20).

Indeed, the birth of the Savior of the world was worthy of such a celebration!

PERPETUAL CELEBRATION IN HEAVEN

While the heavenly celebration that the shepherds were privileged to experience was astoundingly exhilarating, it wasn't a one-off event. Angelic festivities continue even now, unseen by human eyes, each time a sinner is saved because the Incarnate Son of God came to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). He left the glory of heaven, became flesh and dwelt among sinful humanity and gave Himself as the perfect, sinless sacrifice – the Lamb of God – who gave His life and blood to pay the punishment for our sins and save us. You and I were the lost sheep that Isaiah referred to:

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6)

Jesus' Incarnation is Reason for Celebration



BY KATHY NEMEC, ADMIN ASSISTANT, CVC BRUNSWICK

We read Christ's story about the lost sheep; the shepherd left his flock and sought out the stray sheep until it was found. With the weak sheep laid over his shoulders, the shepherd returned home and called his friends and neighbors to celebrate, "I've found my sheep which was lost!"

The joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents never diminishes in heaven. The angels perpetually celebrate the redemptive work of the incarnation. One day we, having believed that the Lamb of God died for our sins to reconcile us to God, will join the eternal celebration around His throne, dressed in His righteousness.

ETERNAL CELEBRATION OF THE INCARNATION

In the book of Revelation, John was allowed a peek into joint worship service around God's throne. He saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, the living creatures, the elders, and the voice of many angels. He heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that is in them celebrating. Myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands were worshiping the Lamb - God Incarnate - with a loud voice, celebrating Him with these words:

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing! ... To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" (Revelation 5:6-14).

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Take a few seconds (or minutes) to meditate on the ramifications of the incarnation and share what that means in your own life by completing this sentence:

Because "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us," I _____.

PRAYER PROMPT

Let's fill our hearts with celebratory worship this Christmas season on earth, to the Lamb - God incarnate - who was slain for our sins, as we anticipate that eternal celebration in heaven.

DAY 20

Finding Jesus is Not Difficult

BY LAUREN MEYER, DIRECTOR OF CVCYOUTH

Have you ever sat down to do a puzzle and just couldn't find the final piece? You searched and searched but the final piece is just nowhere to be found. You start to scramble. You tear up the couch cushions and look beneath the furniture. This puzzle has taken you ages and it just isn't complete without that last piece!

You search far and wide for the missing piece and your hope of ever finishing the puzzle is waning. Just as you are about to give up, you decide to check the box once again, and behold the piece that you've been searching for is right in front of you.

There are plenty of things in this life that can be difficult to find!

Pesky puzzle pieces can be hard to find.

Waldo can be hard to find.

A needle in a haystack can be hard to find.

Toilet paper in a pandemic can be hard to find.

What about Jesus?

Is He hard to find?

Is Jesus, the perfect warrior King, the son of God, the redeemer, hidden from sinners like us? Is He in a far-off and unreachable place? Do we have to search far and wide to catch a glimpse of this Messiah?

Jesus is called Immanuel, which means God with us. This means that Jesus is accessible. He is not far from us – even the most wicked and sinful people. We see this truth in the Christmas story.

READ LUKE 2:15-16

The shepherds were unlikely candidates to be on the guest list for the birth of the Messiah, the savior of the world. Shepherds were not popular guys. They were poor. Showers were not a regular habit for shepherds so they smelled bad. All in all, the shepherds that were the first on the list to see Jesus were social outcasts.

DAY 20

Finding Jesus is Not Difficult



BY LAUREN MEYER, DIRECTOR OF CVCYOUTH

Jesus wasn't hidden from these men. In fact, the shepherds were told about Jesus and they immediately hurried to the village of Bethlehem and found the baby Jesus. Isn't this a beautiful truth? The Messiah, the Savior of the World, is accessible to the poor, the weak, the weary, and the outcast! Jesus is accessible to you and to me.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

And because Jesus is not hard to find, we can come to him with our hurts, fears, sins, and brokenness. We can approach him knowing he is Immanuel – God with us. So what is holding you back from coming to Jesus? Is it a sin that you believe he can't forgive? Do you worry he will judge you because you aren't as smart as other people? Do you fear he will reject you because you don't make much money? Have you fallen for the lie that you just don't measure up?

Jesus wasn't hard to find some 2,000 years ago when the shepherds set out to Bethlehem. That same Jesus is calling sinners to himself – to be washed and made new. He delights to be found.

PRAYER PROMPT

Today spend time as a family thanking God that he is not far off or distant. Thank God that he listens to our prayers. Thank God for being merciful and gracious in welcoming sinners to himself. It might be a good time to spend time individually in prayer – confessing sin or bringing fears to God. He knows us fully, and loves us perfectly.

DAY 21

Jesus Causes Us to Slow Down



BY PASTOR JOSH STONE, CAMPUS PASTOR, CVC BRUNSWICK
Christmastime is often a season of haste. We hustle and bustle through stores, to recitals and concerts, to church events and Christmas eve services. Rarely is this hustle and bustle motivated by happy excitement and joy. Often it's motivated by duty. But, that was not the case for the Shepherds!

READ LUKE 2:15-16

The shepherds were left awe-struck and dumbfounded when the heavenly host left them. The obvious response was to go and see what the angels declared. Who wouldn't! It seems that the shepherds left their sheep and all other pressing obligations to go and see Jesus. Being with Jesus was more important than anything else.

Christmastime is supposed to be a season of celebrating Jesus' birth with our biological and spiritual family. Why is it that this season crowds out the time with others and Jesus that we need to experience the joy of Christmas?

When the shepherds came to Jesus, Scripture says that Jesus was lying in a manger. Like most newborn babies, Jesus was probably sleeping and Mary was probably resting. If you have ever visited a newborn baby and mother in the hospital, you know that you must leave your hustle and bustle at the door. Being with a child requires quietness, calmness, and a slowing down. The haste of the shepherds turned to calm when they were with baby Jesus.

Haste must turn to quietness if we ever hope to pray. In the Bible, Jesus condemns the person who prays with lots of fancy words or out in the street corner for everyone to see. Rather, Jesus invites us to go to a quiet place of prayer for spiritual rest. If we do not experience the stillness and peace that comes in prayer, then we will miss the purpose of Christmas.

The Bible says that Jesus was born to die for our sins. During the Last Supper, a time of prayer, intimacy, and thankfulness to God, Judas Iscariot already had plans to double-cross Jesus. When it was time for Judas to leave, Jesus knew what he was doing, and John 13 says that Judas betrayed Jesus in haste. Judas hustled and bustled to betray Jesus. Thankfully, Judas' haste was all part of God's plan of salvation. Because of Jesus, we can have our sins forgiven, even sins we commit during the hustle and bustle of the season.

DAY 21

Jesus Causes Us to Slow Down



BY PASTOR JOSH STONE, CAMPUS PASTOR, CVC BRUNSWICK

Why don't you use the urgency and haste of this season to grow deeper in your relationship with Jesus rather than have the perfect holiday for your kids or the perfect gift or perfect meal? Why not be like the shepherds who went in haste to find Jesus and be with Jesus? If you do, Jesus will welcome you with open arms.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What causes you to go "in haste?" Are these things lifegiving for you, or do you often find yourself frantically going from one place to the next?

Do you find rest in God's presence? Do you go to him for solace and peace?

PRAYER PROMPT

Pray that God would be your refuge, your strength, and your help in times of trouble. Since God knows everything, he is never surprised by circumstances or frantic to get things done. Spend time asking God to put himself in the center of your thoughts so that you can focus on prayer. Pray that he would grant you a measure of peace today that is impossible to experience apart from Him.

DAY 22

Jesus' Story Should Be Pondered

BY NAOMI DEVA, SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIST

Have you ever gotten so caught up in the excitement and chaos of a moment that you totally miss the significance of it? Think about the Christmas season. We fill our schedules with buying gifts, Christmas parties, caroling, baking cookies, being around family, and so much more. These are all great things of course, yet we can get so caught up in the blur of things to do that we sometimes forget to ponder the meaning of why we are celebrating, and suddenly the season is over and the joy of Christ's birth fades quickly to the back of our minds.

This same type of excitement and busyness is surrounding the story of the birth of Christ. We see how miraculous this story is. The travel to Bethlehem, not having room in the local inn, angels, the massive announcement, shepherds running to find him, the wise men, the gifts, and all of the prophecy being fulfilled. But we can learn an important lesson from how Mary responds.

READ LUKE 2:19

For the past several days we've been reading this story recorded in the book of Luke. There is a lot going on and this is a totally acceptable response to what is happening. Yet if you look forward to Luke 4:22, you'll see that the people quickly forget about Jesus and His miraculous entry into the world.

Yet Mary's reaction is different from that of the shepherds and the crowds.

She ponders this news calmly, with humility. "Pondering" means that she began to see the connection between the Old Testament prophecies and now these astounding events. Imagine the thoughts that must have been running through her head at that moment! Through these miraculous things this young woman experienced, she started to realize clear revelations of Jesus' identity and his mission on earth.

But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.

She preserves in her thoughts everything that happened. The difference is that the crowds of people who heard the news were fascinated by it, yet their fascination died down and they soon forget. By meditating and pondering the news further, Mary is transformed by the news and she is growing more and more in understanding of who Jesus is and who He will be.

DAY 22

Jesus' Story Should Be Pondered



BY NAOMI DEVA, SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIST

Sometimes when exciting things happen in our lives, we can forget to cherish them and see how incredible God is in bringing it all together for good and for His glory. We sometimes tend to take them for granted, or have a quick burst of temporary joy, just like the joy of the holiday season, then quickly discard it, as the crowds did, as soon as the Christmas season is over.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

This holiday season, how will you make time to ponder the true meaning of celebrating Christmas?

PRAYER PROMPT

God, thank You for sending your Son to be born for us. Help me, this busy holiday season, to remember and ponder the real reason for joy in celebrating Christ's birth. Help me remember that trying to find joy in the excitement and things around me are fleeting, and to focus on you this Christmas. Amen.

DAY 23

Jesus' Story Should Be Shared

BY PASTOR BRIAN HOWELL, INVITE PASTOR

What an absolutely unlikely bunch. Of all the people that God could choose to reveal Himself to directly about the birth of His Son, a Saviour, He chose shepherds. Really? What did a shepherd do in these days?

Shepherds were known as people who were honest and straightforward. Their job? Protect their flock and guide them to good pastures with plenty of food and easily accessible water. Why? Because families these days relied on sheep to provide food, wool, and sheepskin. Because of their value, shepherds would stay with their sheep both day and night.

This was not without basis, though. Throughout the Old Testament, God worked mightily through shepherds – David, Moses, and Zechariah to name a few. So it really shouldn't surprise us that God made the shepherds after this incredible revelation of Jesus' birth the first "tellers," the ones that would be the first to declare this Good News! Let's read our verse for today.

READ LUKE 2:20

Several things are notable here. First of all, the shepherds responded when they heard the Good News of great joy issued by God through the angels (see Luke 2: 10-14). And after they heard, they responded and went quickly to the place where they were told this Child was (see Luke 2:16). Then, they saw with their own eyes what had been declared to them. They found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, lying in a manger. From the moment that they heard the news and had seen the Child, they began to tell everyone about Him (see Luke 2:17). People that heard it were amazed by the story told by these shepherds (see Luke 2:18). So did the shepherds then take this major news on the speakers' circuit and use their newfound visibility to tell large crowds of what they had heard and seen?

No, verse 20 tells us they returned - they went back - to shepherding! They returned to their ordinary responsibilities and lives, but they were not the same. They were radically altered by their encounter with Christ. What a major shift! One day, simple shepherds – the next, glorifying and praising God. To glorify here in this context means "to magnify, to render or esteem glorious and to celebrate." To praise here means "to lift a high level of adoration, to sing in honor to God." They stayed shepherds, but their lives were now radically different – they were given in praise to God, and they were concerned primarily with sharing His story for His glory! The evidence of a life transformed by Jesus is one that is lived in praise to God and focused not on themselves, but on His story and His glory. This was a story they had to share. Jesus had come to earth to redeem us!

DAY 23

Jesus' Story Should Be Shared

◆ ◆ ◆
BY PASTOR BRIAN HOWELL, INVITE PASTOR

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Are you living a life like the shepherds, who shares this story of the Good News of Jesus with everyone? Is His story evidenced and magnified by your life?

PRAYER PROMPT

Lord, let my life reflect Your incredible story of redemption through the birth of Your Son, Jesus. Help me to be a “teller,” to live a life that is ready and not ashamed to share with joy the story of Jesus to all who will hear.

DAY 24

Jesus is Named Jesus for a Reason



BY KELLY GARCIA, ADMIN ASSISTANT, INVITE & CARE

Christmas Eve. As a child, I remember going to my grandmother's house. All my aunts, uncles, and cousins were there. This was the only time I would see many of them. As the adults sat around the table, the kids would play, running in/out of the kitchen and snacking on the delicious food between games. You could feel the excitement and joy amongst all the children as we waited to open the presents under the tree.

As adults, we recall those fond childhood memories. As the year's pass, it seems that the season becomes more commercialized. The world is rife with conflict and individual entitlement. Perhaps if we focused on the true meaning of Christmas with the joy and innocence of a child waiting for Santa, more unbelievers would seek to follow Jesus.

READ LUKE 2:21, MATTHEW 1:21

Jesus was born into a Jewish family. In obedience to the law, on the 8th day, he was circumcised and presented in the temple where he was named Jesus. This ancient rite was intended as a perpetual witness to the sin inherited by every child of man. Jesus came not to destroy the law but to fulfill God's covenant with Abraham. And though He was without sin, His fleshly appearance was now in the likeness of sinful man.

Jesus is the Greek translation of the Hebrew name Joshua. This is not a rare name. How many Joshuas do you know? The name is significant because of who chose the name and what the name means. In Matthew 1:21 the angel Gabriel appears to Joseph stating Mary will have a son, conceived by the Holy Ghost, and he is to name the child Jesus. The name Joshua translates to "Jehovah is Salvation" and is also known as "God Saves." Did you know that?! The angel explains that the child will save His people from their sins.

Jesus' name is meant to remind us of His role and purpose. He came to be our Savior and save us from our sins. It is sin that causes misery in our world and separates us from God. Jesus, without sin, accomplishes this task by becoming sin for us, suffering, and dying on the cross. Jesus has paid the price for our sins. But perhaps even greater, He defeated the power of sin. Jesus was born to die. Thus, paving the way for us to spend eternal life with God the Father.

DAY 24

Jesus is Named Jesus for a Reason



BY KELLY GARCIA, ADMIN ASSISTANT, INVITE & CARE

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Jesus came to save “His People.” While all children are born of God, not all will repent and seek a relationship with Jesus, and thus be saved. Are you part of “His People?” Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior? If you have, revisit those memories. If not, perhaps today is the day when you will trust Jesus to be the leader and forgiver of your life.

PRAYER PROMPT

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Son Jesus Christ who came to die for us, in order that none should perish, but all who believe might have everlasting life! Father, open my heart and mind to acknowledge I am a sinner. (Take some time to confess and repent. Ask God for Grace and Mercy.) Father, you are loving, gracious, faithful, and forgiving. Help me turn from my old, sinful ways and seek to follow your Son, Jesus. In your name, I pray, Amen.

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given - the Savior of the World!

DAY 25

Joyfully Celebrate That a Rescuer Came

BY PASTOR JOE VALENTI, EQUIP PASTOR

When my son Logan was little, he was eating lunch at the kitchen table one day. It seems that it was probably a Friday because I was home with the kids and Linda was at work. Logan fell out of his seat – which was normal because he had a habit of getting so engaged in cartoons that he would slowly slide off of his chair.

I told him to get up and keep eating, but he didn't move. Eventually, I realized that he was not responding. It was one of the scariest moments of my entire life. I couldn't find the phone and was carrying him around the house trying to find it. Eventually, I called 911 and stayed on the line telling the dispatcher that – "no, he still wasn't doing anything" and that "yes, he was losing color."

When people are in emergencies, they often say that it felt like forever. For me, it felt like our local rescue squad flew there – they were there so quickly. And boy, am I glad that they were. Two firemen ran into the house, looked at Logan, and said to me, "we've got to go now." They picked him up, put him in the back of the squad, and raced away.

As we've learned over these last 24 days, we've all got an emergency on our hands – the world has an emergency – sin separates us from God. And way back in the beginning, God made a promise that one day there would be someone who would crush the head of the snake (the devil) and bring humanity back into a relationship with God.

The Old Testament was filled with prophecies about this Savior that would come. He would be a light, a lamb, and a king all at the same time. But it took a while – several thousand years for the plan to be worked out in perfect detail.

But then – the moment that the world had been waiting for. The arrival of the rescuer!

READ LUKE 2:1-21

I called Linda and told her through gobs of tears that Logan had been rushed to the ER. I got in my truck and sped off to meet the ambulance. Linda and I pulled into the ER at the same time, rushed in together, and heard the sound of Logan crying. It was the best cry I've ever heard. He had been rescued.

DAY 25

Joyfully Celebrate That a Rescuer Came

BY PASTOR JOE VALENTI, EQUIP PASTOR

We went a few weeks later to thank the firemen who saved Logan's life that day. If they had not been there, he would have died. I am 100% positive.

In a similar fashion, we sometimes fool ourselves into thinking that we're able to save ourselves from our sin by being good, going to church, giving to charity, or doing other good deeds. But we're no match for sin. We cannot free ourselves from its penalty or its power.

We are not able to rescue ourselves.

But during this Christmas season, we celebrate the fact that a rescuer came. When we had no hope, God himself entered the world. Jesus, God the Son, became human supernaturally. He lived the life we could never live. He died the death that we deserve to die. And he rose from the grave to give us a new life both now and for eternity.

Jesus – the perfect rescuer – has come!

So, celebrate! Rejoice! Join the angels and the shepherds and the wise men and worship!!

Here's one of my favorite Christmas songs. Put it on the loudest speaker system that you have in your house, crank it up, and rejoice!!

[Chris Tomlin - Born That We May Have Life](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What is your favorite lyric in this song? What part of Christ's character does it speak of?

PRAYER PROMPT

Take some time to praise Jesus for his humble nature, being the sacrificial lamb, and saving us from sin and death. Give thanks for the present that is Jesus' presence on Earth.

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