



*a time to*

## **Pause, Ponder & Prepare**

*to celebrate the birth of Our Savior, Jesus Christ*

The birth of Jesus Christ more than two thousand years ago is more than just a story...it's the fulfillment of a promise, a life transforming event.

As we celebrate the Advent season this year we invite you to transform your preparation of Christmas from one of commercial expectations/ obligations to one of personal transformation and spiritual affirmation by creating a faith devotional.

The purpose of this journey is to honor God in prayer, reflection, and by creating art about His holy words and the gift of Jesus' birth and by showing your gratitude for his gift of a savior to us. These devotions have been prepared as you ponder and creatively express your advent journey this year.

It is our hope that by spending some quiet time each day reading this daily devotional and using the inspiration to commemorate artistically, you can reclaim the true meaning of Christmas.

Read the scriptures with your imagination. Focus on the images- light, stars, crowns, shadows, water, wilderness, holy mountains, lion and lambs and enter into the poetry of the Bible. Allow yourself to be led through the wilderness to streams of living water. Even if you have not used techniques such as writing, art journaling, or scrapbooking, allow yourself to experiment with them this year. There is no magic in the techniques, but they are a way to consciously place you in God's presence and allow Him to create through your hands and heart.

May your Christmas be radically different - take the time to see the Christ in Christmas and the art you create will be a continuing testimony of your advent faith walk and his transforming power.

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# Day 1

## Pause, Ponder & Prepare

***“At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” Luke 21:27-28***

An “Advent” is about the preparation, anticipation, and expectation of something that is coming. Every Advent season, Christians look forward to celebrating the day when love was born – the day our Savior, Jesus Christ, was born in Bethlehem.

We can’t exactly say what people did in expectation of Christ’s first coming, except that it may be like our awaiting the time of His return. Jesus tells us that His second coming will be preceded by all kinds of anguish, perplexity, and terror. These are not the sorts of things that give us hope, but Jesus tells us to stand up in hope because our redemption is near. It takes great faith to be hopeful when it seems like the whole world is falling apart all around you. Such faith does not come by accident; instead it comes from God. This faith is also often strengthened by the very hope that sees us through pain and suffering.

We prepare during the season of Advent so that our faith can be strengthened in the confidence that our redemption is near. As we pause to prepare for the annual celebration of the Savior’s birth, we live in confidence that Christ Jesus has redeemed us and no matter what chaos is going on in the world He will come to rescue us from it.

### *Prayer*

God, thank you for bringing joy to the world by sending your son, Jesus, to take away the punishment for my sins so I can have a relationship with you. I am grateful that you are always in control and you give me hope. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

### *Ponder*

Let your mind wander to your memories of Christmas as a child, the excitement, lights, colors, etc. How do you compare the anticipation you had about Santa and getting gifts with your anticipation of the coming of Jesus Christ?

## Day 2

### Promises Fulfilled

***“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah.” Jeremiah 33:14***

In the days leading up to Christmas, it is traditional to read the Bible and focus on the promises God fulfilled. God’s first promise to us came the very same day Adam and Eve disobeyed God and brought sin into the world. As God cursed the serpent, which was the devil, God promised, “I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers, He will crush your head and you will strike His heel” (Genesis 3:15). The very same day that Adam and Eve condemned themselves to death by breaking God’s law, God promised that one of their descendants would come and make everything right again between God and sinful people. God repeated this promise throughout history whenever His people needed to be reminded that He would rescue them from sin and its deadly consequences.

In the days of the prophet Jeremiah, God’s people had forgotten about Him and were facing their destruction at the hands of the Babylonians. But God had not forgotten them. Despite their disobedience and unbelief, God declared that He would still keep His part of the promise and send a Savior. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem was the beginning of the fulfillment of this promise, and the death and resurrection of Jesus was the complete fulfillment of our salvation.

#### *Prayer*

Lord Jesus, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). According to your will, enable me to share the gift of your salvation with those I meet so that they too will know your saving grace. Amen.

#### *Ponder*

Think about the idea of promises and what it means to keep them. God always keeps his promises. What promises has he kept with you?

## Day 3

### The Source of Strength

***“May [the Lord] strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all His holy ones”. 1 Thessalonians 3:13***

These words from the apostle Paul to some of the very first Christians are a great lead-in to how God’s way of salvation is exactly opposite to the world’s. Where worldly theologians would encourage us to strengthen ourselves, Paul prays that God Himself would be the strength of His people. Paul could write this with confidence because there are many places in the Bible that tell us that this is true, such as Psalm 28:8 – “The Lord is the strength of His people, a fortress of salvation.”

What comfort in these days of Advent to acknowledge that while our own strength is limited, God’s is limitless. There will always be times when our strength is not enough; but when God is working on our behalf even the worst trouble cannot overcome God’s strength.

The world would not expect this, thinking that we can accomplish this on our own by being so good that there is nothing to blame. But Paul reminds us that the only way we can truly be blameless before God is to have our sins forgiven. This forgiveness can only come through faith and trust in Jesus who took away the punishment for our sins so that He might present us blameless to God.

#### *Prayer*

God, when I do things on my own and fail to invite you into the process the results are hit or miss. I now release my selfish ways and invite you into my life. I ask that you be present in my thoughts and actions. While Christmas is traditionally a very demanding time of the year, help me to focus on the real gift of the season, your son Jesus, who you sent to take away the sins of the world. I am so grateful for your gift of forgiveness. Amen.

#### *Ponder*

Think about how you have done things in your own strength and the results. How has God’s forgiveness changed your life and how can you tap into God’s supernatural strength in the future?

# Day 4

## The King Comes

***“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” Luke 19:38***

If Advent is the time to be hopeful for something good to come for us, then we ought to know what to expect. In this verse from the Bible, the people of Jerusalem seem to expect a triumphant king, but Jesus knew what was waiting for Him in Jerusalem ... and it wasn't the adoring crowds.

Only a short time before the crowds cheered Him on with these words, Jesus had told His disciples that He was going to Jerusalem to be handed over, mocked, insulted, spit on, flogged, and killed. That doesn't sound very blessed, but still He went to Jerusalem.

It wasn't the first time Jesus made what we might view as a seemingly bad choice. As God, He knew that the people He had created in His own image had sinned and that the only way to save them from eternal punishment was to suffer in their place. So, to accomplish this, He became man and was born in Bethlehem so that He could suffer as a man for the sins of all mankind. If we are honest, we have to admit that this is not an equal trade. The Son of God ... for me? It's not fair, but Jesus thought we were worth it. Because He came for us all, faithful Christians can say, “We are blessed because our God, the King, comes to save us!”

### *Prayer*

Lord God, I praise you that you have offered me salvation through your son, Jesus, so I may live my life in perfect hope, and trust in your gracious forgiveness. It's hard for me to even imagine all that Jesus went through just to save me, but I am grateful. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

### *Ponder*

Have you ever experienced doing something completely selfless just because you love someone? What does the Kingship of God look like in your life?

## Day 5

### More than Just a Pardon

***"The Lord has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: The Lord has sent this message to every land: "Tell the people of Israel, 'Look, your Savior is coming. See, he brings his reward with him as he comes.'" Isaiah 62:11***

So what's the big deal with Advent? The Bible passage above shows that the prophet Isaiah knew the answer long before Jesus came. "Look, your Savior is coming!" The coming of the Savior is a big deal. Imagine if you were imprisoned on death row. In that situation, the most important thing to you would be the arrival of a messenger bringing news of your pardon ... or not. The arrival of such a pardon would mean life. The absence would mean death. Because of the sin we live with every day, we face a death sentence unless we receive a pardon.

Advent anticipates the pardon. Christmas Day celebrates that our pardon has arrived. Good Friday remembers that our pardon was accomplished at the cost of Christ's suffering and death in our place. Easter is the celebration that we have been set free and the threat of death no longer hangs over us. But Isaiah's message is about more than just a pardon. The Lord promises that we will receive a reward when our Savior comes – the riches of His heavenly kingdom. It is no wonder that Christmas is such a joyous celebration preceded by a season of such expectation.

#### *Prayer*

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for the healing that you bring through the gift of your forgiveness. Your pardon takes away the burdens of my sin. Amen.

#### *Ponder*

How are you changed because of the pardon you have received? What does the pardon look like in your life?

## Day 6

### The Right Clothes

***“Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” Romans 13:14***

Some might read this Bible passage and think that all we have to do to be a Christian is to put on Christ just like we would a fancy set of clothing. Some would say, “As long as we look like Christ in some superficial way, then we don’t have to be like Christ in any meaningful way.” This is exactly what the Pharisees were trying to do. They not only wore their WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) bracelets on their arms, but on their foreheads as well. It wasn’t enough.

We all have seen ill-mannered people dressed in fine clothes. They may look respectable, but it is only a matter of time before they show what they’re really like on the inside. Jesus spoke of such people (and of all of us) when He said, “Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander”(Matthew 15:19).

Our problem is not that we aren’t dressed properly, but that we have a diseased heart. The trouble with a bad heart is not only that dressing it up doesn’t heal it, but that we can’t transplant a healthy heart ourselves. Fortunately Jesus is the Great Physician who creates in us a new heart. Only through Christ’s power can we forget the desires of our sinful heart and find ourselves clothed in Him.

#### *Prayer*

Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for giving me a new heart that is full of joy. May I delight in the peace that comes through the forgiveness of my sins. Amen.

#### *Ponder*

The picture of the “right clothes” is given to us in Ephesians 6:13-18, putting on the armor of God. What are you comfortable wearing and what is difficult for you to wear?



## Day 7

# Everything's Under Control

***"Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long". Psalm 25:4-5***

In what or in whom do you place your hope? Many children hope that Santa Claus might bring them a favorite toy. This becomes a great opportunity to teach children that they can't always get the things they hope for, helping them appreciate what they have and keeping them from becoming spoiled. Perhaps you put your hope in your job or having enough in savings to get you through any circumstance. But even the most diligent, hard-working person can be laid off or lose a job, or an accident or illness can make money fly away like the wind. Yet this becomes a great opportunity for keeping us from getting spoiled and thinking that we don't need God.

Paul reminds us in Romans 8:26 that "we do not know what we ought to pray for." This is why in the Lord's Prayer, we pray to God, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Since God is our Savior, we trust that He knows best and that He has everything under control. So we pray that God would show us His ways, teach us His path, and guide us in His truth, because He is our Savior in Jesus Christ, in whom we trust all day long.

### *Prayer*

Dear Lord God, I praise and thank you for fulfilling the promises of your Holy Word in sending your son, Jesus, to redeem me from all my sins. I put my hope in you because you will never let me down. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

### *Ponder*

What do you let God be in control of in your life? What would you like to give Him control of?

## Day 8

### Preparing hearts

***“As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: “A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.”  
Luke 3:4-5***

A very special guest is coming to your house this Christmas. What should you do to get ready? You could certainly clean your home to make it ready and welcoming. But what if you do something to offend your guest while he's there? If that happened, you'd probably feel obligated to apologize and perhaps even send a gift. Of course, the value of the gift would have to be proportionate to the size of the offense or you could risk offending your guest again.

What if your honored guest was God Himself? How would you prepare for His coming? What about the things you've done to offend Him – those things called sin? Any gift you might give already belongs to Him, so you can't impress Him with even the most extravagant gesture. You certainly can't make God think you are better than you are – He already knows you aren't even half as good as you think you are.

Advent isn't about God coming to punish you, nor is it about trying to make yourself worthy to meet God. Advent is about God honoring us with His presence in Jesus. Love was born at Christmas – Jesus came to do all that was necessary to make us worthy.

#### *Prayer*

God, I am so blessed that you chose me to be your child, and I don't have to do anything to earn it. Help me to receive the gift of your presence, especially during this holiday season. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

#### *Ponder*

Imagine what it would be like if you knew God was coming to your house. What would you do? Preparing your heart for the gift of Jesus takes time and repentance. What state is your heart in as you prepare for the birth of Jesus celebration?

## Day 9

### A New Kind of Love

***“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.” Philippians 1:9-11***

What a wonderful prayer is found in this verse. Yet I expect it is extremely common, if not universal, for pastors to pray this same prayer concerning the people in their congregation.

It might appear strange to worldly ears to pray that love would abound in knowledge and insight because the world equates love with a feeling. But unfortunately, feelings are fickle and when pleasure turns to pain and joy to sorrow, the world would abandon love for something more pleasurable. Praise God that in Jesus we have a Savior who continued to love even when those who took no small pleasure in torturing Him put Him to death.

The second half of the verse is equally foreign to our ears, though equally wonderful in Jesus Christ. The blamelessness for which Paul prayed comes through faith in Jesus, not because we somehow deserved what was best and took care of it! For our sinfulness condemns us, and the only way we will be found blameless in the day of Christ is if we have His pardon and forgiveness. Jesus said, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one He has sent” (John 6:29). He won complete forgiveness and salvation for us – all the glory and praise goes to God.

#### *Prayer*

Lord, thank you for loving me so much that you became a man willing to die for my sins, bridging the gap between me and You God. Amen.

#### *Ponder*

This verse is a prayer asking for wisdom and understanding in our loving. The Bible is the best source for that knowledge. How do you let the Bible affect how you love others?

## Day 10

### The Real Thing

***[Jesus said,] “For false Christ’s and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect – if that were possible. So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.” Mark 13:22-23***

I’m told that those who handle money are taught to look for counterfeit bills in a certain way. They don’t learn about what counterfeits would look like; instead they learn what the genuine article looks like. There are many ways to make false currency, but the real thing is always the same.

So it is with Jesus. He never changes, but how do we recognize Him when He comes? In John 5:39, Jesus provides the answer: “The scriptures testify about Me.” The Bible tells us who Jesus is, why He came, what He did, and what He’s going to do.

A good summary statement is found in Ephesians 2:8-9, which tell us that our salvation is a gift from God through Jesus. Most false messiahs would cast doubt about the “gift” and the “not-by-works” part, turning our attention away from Christ for the assurance of salvation toward their own words or our own worthiness or feelings. Because we are sinful, we live under the law, and anything that turns us away from Christ is false – no matter how comforting or reassuring it may seem. During Advent, as always, it’s important to keep our focus on Jesus so that we won’t be deceived by counterfeits.

#### *Prayer*

It is so comforting to know that you never change—you are always the same. You love me and want to bless me. Help me stay focused on your gift of grace this Christmas. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

#### *Ponder*

Presents come wrapped in beautiful packages with special papers and bows. Think about the greatest gift you have ever received. How has that gift changed your life?

## Day 11

### Leaping for Joy

***“But for you who revere My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.” Malachi 4:2***

Here God provides a beautiful picture of what the coming of Jesus means for those who trust in Him as their Savior. It is like the sun rising and bringing healing to all upon whom it shines. Those who reject Jesus and His healing forgiveness will find a much different fate, but it is all joy for the forgiven people of God.

It's no accident that Jesus is called the “son of righteousness.” Although the world would expect Jesus to come like a ticket-taker and collect tokens from those who have accumulated the sufficient amount of righteousness, that isn't what we learn about Him from the Bible. God knows that our sinfulness will always leave us empty-handed in the righteousness department, but Jesus has an overabundance of righteousness that becomes ours through Him.

At the coming of Christ, we will leap like calves because the burden of our sin will be completely removed. We don't realize just how much our sin weighs us down because we live each and every day of our lives under its heavy weight. Even for the strongest, sin is a tremendous burden that drags us down to the grave. The righteous healing that Jesus brings removes that burdensome weight and we shall leap for joy forever in ways we can hardly imagine.

#### *Prayer*

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the healing that you bring through your forgiveness. You promise to take my sins away and free me to live the way you intended. I love you and praise you. Amen.

#### *Ponder*

Do you leap for joy at the mention of His name? Can you release the sin that is weighing you down right now and feel His healing?

## Day 12

# The Unshakable Kingdom

***“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire.”***

***Hebrews 12:28-29***

For many years, those who treasure Christmas have complained about how much this holy day has become commercialized. In recent years, attacks on Christmas have become quite open. But if Christmas is no more than an excuse for retailers to make money, then there really is nothing special about the day. If Christians close their church doors when Christmas falls on Sunday, how can we expect society to revere the holy day? If treasured celebrations like Christmas can be torn down with impunity, then perhaps nothing is sacred and even Christianity itself is under attack.

People around the world celebrate Christmas differently from country to country, city to city, even house to house. Some put up trees, some put up wreaths, some eat cinnamon buns and some hang stockings, some put out shoes, some go to a lot of parties and some go to church. No matter how we celebrate Christmas, Christmas itself doesn't change. God will always be the same. He will always love us. He sent His son to earth to save us.

Jesus assures us that His kingdom cannot be shaken even though the heavens and the earth will all be destroyed. It's this unshakable kingdom that Jesus promises to give to His faithful people. Although we do not yet enjoy this kingdom in all its fullness, we still live under Christ's rule and trust that anything we now lack He will surely provide in due time. This is why the coming Christmas celebration is a remarkable day for giving thanks to God, and worships Him with reverence and awe. He provides all we really need.

### *Prayer*

Dear Lord, I worship you with deep respect and wonder. May my celebration of Christmas be all about you. Thank you for sending your son. Amen.

### *Ponder*

God is constant like a star and His kingdom is unshakable. How can you experience his unshakable kingdom this year?

# Day 13

## Filled with Joy

***“The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.” Psalm 126:3***

This short verse not only summarizes what Christmas is all about, it also summarizes what Christians believe. The Lord has sent a Savior – Jesus – and He has redeemed us from our sins. To redeem means to buy back ... He bought us back with the innocent suffering and death of His Son. And God gives all of this to us, above and beyond the daily blessings He provides, despite our complete unworthiness. No wonder we are filled with joy. Nowhere in God’s Word does He say that we have done great things for Him so that He can be impressed. In fact, the one man who said something similar went home unjustified according to Jesus (Luke 18:9-14). We have not done great things for God, nor can we do so. We cannot measure how close we are to God by figuring out how good we are, no matter how much we imagine our good works are worth. God knows we are unworthy, and still He does great things for us.

The Good News of the Gospel is that Jesus has done for us the great things we could not do for ourselves. We are filled with joy – at Christmas and forever – because what Jesus has done brings us forgiveness, peace, reconciliation with God, and life everlasting in paradise.

### *Prayer*

Lord God, I praise you and thank you for fulfilling the promises in the Bible by sending your Son, Jesus, to redeem me from all my sins. I realize that I have tried to do things my own way instead of turning to you, but I ask forgiveness for my sins. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

### *Ponder*

The song “O Come all Ye Faithful” reminds us of what Jesus has done for us and helps us to focus on the joy of his work. Look up the words of the song, or listen to the song and experience His joy!

## Day 14

### No Fear

***“And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found grace (free, spontaneous, absolute favor and loving-kindness) with God.” Luke 1:30***

God's favor and loving-kindness doesn't always bring instant success or fame. This very first Christmas greeting, given by an angel to the shepherds and to Mary was “do not be afraid.”

God's blessing on Mary that she was the mother of the Messiah would lead to much pain, rejection and sorrow. Think about her life from this moment on. She was visited by an angel, overcome by the Holy Spirit, learned she was pregnant with the Son of God, broke up and reunited with her betrothed, took a lengthy trip, returned, and traveled to a foreign village while nine months pregnant. Then she gave birth in an unfamiliar place and was visited by many unknown strange people. A lot of life changes in a short period of time leads to fear! Amazing her responses to all these changes in her life! She accepted the ways of the Lord and submitted to His plan for her life, even though I am sure she was filled with fear.

#### *Prayer*

Father, you are my Rock and refuge. No matter what changes around me, I will not fear, for you are with me. In my busy and hectic world, I need to be quiet and trust your plan and let go of my fears. . Amen.

#### *Ponder*

Jesus came as a baby to save us and His death and resurrection reminds us you came to take away our sin and our fear. What do you fear? How are you handling your fears?



## Day 15

### Real Peace

***“... the Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:5-7***

We hear a lot about “peace on earth” at Christmas, especially from the chorus of angels in Luke 2:14 who sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.” Yet we don’t see peace on earth, even among Christians.

Although Jesus was peaceful, He endured much violence and hatred. He also knew that because we are sinners in a sinful world, we would not live completely peaceful lives either. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His followers, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness... Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me” (Matthew 5:10-11).

The peace that will “guard your heart” is not a peace you can readily see; this peace comes from trusting in Jesus for your salvation from sin. Since Christ has saved us and remains near to us, we can be at peace even during the worst trials the world would bring. It is not a peace that comes from a lack of conflict; it is a confidence that Jesus will rescue us no matter how difficult the situation.

#### *Prayer*

Lord, in the midst of the chaos and emotions of the season, I pray for the peace that only you can offer. I want the world to see my peace and joy so they will want to know you. Amen.

#### *Ponder*

What are you worried about? Have you prayed about it and asked God to give you peace? Think about your confidence that Jesus is your Savior and rescuer. What does that peace and confidence look like for you?

## Day 16

# Real Repentance

***“In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” Matthew 3:1-2***

John the Baptist figures prominently in the Advent Bible readings even though he was still a baby when Jesus was born. But Advent is about preparation, and 30 years after Jesus was born, John prepared the faithful to meet their long-awaited Savior. His message was simple and straightforward: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” Christ’s kingdom, however, was not to be a worldly kingdom, but a heavenly kingdom.

Repentance is an important part of our life in Christ’s kingdom, but it is not what brings our salvation. Christ’s life and death is the cause of our salvation. To repent is to turn away from sin, but we cannot make God save us, no matter how or how often we repent. God commands us to repent, not because we can save ourselves, but because He knows that a repentant sinner will remain in faith, while an unrepentant sinner will lose his faith. We certainly do not repent as often, or as sincerely, as we should; but God’s forgiveness in Christ Jesus remains certain.

Let us then repent of our sins, for the kingdom of heaven is near. But let us not put our faith in our repentance; instead let us put all our trust in our King, Jesus, who has redeemed us from all sin.

### *Prayer*

Father, I tend to gloss over my sins instead of confessing them and repenting. I need your power to turn away from my sins. I need you to be my Savior and Leader in my life. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

### *Ponder*

How difficult has it been for you to make a U-turn when you recognize you are sinning? Think of a U-turn as a direction you can focus on when you need to repent.

## Day 17

### Real Comfort

***“Comfort, comfort My people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, and that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.” Isaiah 40:1-2***

What if you believed that this Christmas you would receive “double for all your sins.” Would you find that comforting? You might say, “That depends ... double what?” If it were double the punishment, then you would surely not take comfort. However, as God proclaims the coming of the Savior of the world through the words of Isaiah, He brings comfort instead.

God instructs the prophet Isaiah to give a threefold message of double comfort: First, he is to comfort God’s people that their “hard service had been completed.” Second, their “sin has been paid for,” as Christ would pay for the sins of all people.

Finally, God’s people hear about a double reward from the Lord’s hand. This reward doesn’t come because we or anyone else deserves it, or because God feels sorry for any pain that’s been inflicted. No, in spite of our sinfulness and the punishment we deserve, Christ Jesus has made sure that we receive a double reward of God’s grace, much like Job received (compare Job 42:12 with Job 1:3).

#### *Prayer*

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for forgiving me and comforting me when I least deserve it. I know you are always faithful and trustworthy. Amen.

#### *Ponder*

I imagine a soft cuddly blanket wrapped around me when I am seeking comfort. Have you found His comfort? What brings you comfort when you are worried?

## Day 18

### Real Faith

***“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Romans 15:13***

These words remind us about the importance of faith. Advent is about eagerly anticipating what is coming; yet it is rooted in what has already come. We can trust that God’s promise of forgiveness and salvation through Jesus Christ is truly free and is for us. And because God gives us Christ’s forgiveness and salvation through faith, He is called the “God of hope.”

This Advent we may eagerly anticipate celebrating Jesus’ birth, but the celebration itself should not be what fills us with joy and peace. What fills us with God’s joy is that our Savior has already come and has won our salvation, and that He is coming again to bring our salvation to its ultimate fulfillment. Until Jesus comes back for His second (final) coming, we live by faith through an extended Advent season. We trust that just as God has kept His promise in Christ’s first Advent, so He will also keep His promise of a glorious reunion with Jesus. This faith is what fills us with joy and peace as we hope for Christ’s coming. Because God is trustworthy, our hope is absolutely certain and true; therefore we are filled with joy and peace... right now.

#### *Prayer*

Dear Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for bringing joy to the world. May I delight in the peace that comes through the forgiveness of my sins. Amen.

#### *Ponder*

Write in your journal the words joy, peace and hope. Make a list of the things that bring you joy, peace and hope.

## Day 19

### Glory to the Lord

***“And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior ...” Luke 1:46-47***

Mary had a lot to ponder. Almost as soon as Mary hears the news from the angel that she is going to give birth to the Savior of the world, she sings a song of praise to God. We should note that her song (the Magnificat (Latin) found in Luke 1:46-55) is about what God has done to bring salvation to the world.

Even when Mary does mention herself, she says, “from now on all generations will call me blessed.” She doesn’t say that she is better or more worthy than anyone else – in fact she admits her own sinfulness when she calls God “my Savior.” The song of Mary often called the Magnificat says exactly what she is feeling – it glorifies God by telling what He has done to save us. The words are beautiful and are just as true for every Christian today as they were for Mary.

Truly all generations of Christians can call Mary blessed for being chosen by God to be the mother of our Lord, yet all who believe in Jesus as Savior are even more richly blessed. Jesus is the mighty one who has done great things for you and me and all people. Jesus deserves all the praise and glory because He has accomplished for us what we could not – salvation from our sins.

#### *Prayer*

Father, thank you for choosing to bless me as your child. Help me to be salt and light in the world so others will turn to you for their salvation. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

#### *Ponder*

Do you glorify the Lord with your life? Does your spirit rejoice in your Savior? Can you call yourself blessed? Make a list of all your blessings. Tuck them into an envelope and when you open them next Christmas season, continue to praise Him by recognizing your new blessings each year.

## Day 20

### Spirit filled

***“But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. Against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23)***

The holidays are filled with the words, “love, joy, peace” and yet, how do we attain these attributes? A dump truck full of these fruit of the spirit will not be unloaded into an unwilling heart. They are gifts from God for the prepared and willing heart of a believer. We can ask for the gifts of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self control from the Holy Spirit. Isn't it interesting how we pray to God for protections and we claim the name of Jesus, but we forget to address the Holy Spirit? I can tell when I haven't asked for His empowerment because the fruit of the spirit are void in my life.

When our lives are filled with the Holy Spirit, we perceive things our human eyes cannot fathom. Energy, joy and the bubbly effervescence of His love rush out when our lives are filled with the Holy Spirit. What are you missing by not including Him in your spiritual life?

#### *Prayer*

Father, fill me with the presence of Your Holy Spirit. As I read your Holy word, may your Holy Spirit guide me and offer wisdom. May I be filled with the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

#### *Ponder*

No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. What fruit is abundant in your life and what fruit do you want to grow?

## Day 21

### Star of Wonder

***“After they had heard the king, they went on their way and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.” (Matthew 2:9-10)***

Many have tried to explain the “star of wonder” which guided the Magi to the young King. Was it a comet, the planet Venus, a supernova, a conjunction of planets, a pause in planetary orbit? But whatever it was hovering over the stable was definitely supernatural. But then again, think of all the supernatural miracles in the Christmas story, why does a supernatural occurrence created by God seem so contrived?

After all, “He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name” (Psalm 147:4). Couldn’t the God who created and placed the stars in the sky also create a star of wonder to lead a group of men away from their past and toward a glorious new hope in Christ? What would be so difficult about creating a single star to guide seekers to the Perfect Light?

#### *Prayer*

Father, guide me to your perfect light. Help me to stay focused this season on the joy of the birth of Christ. Amen.

#### *Ponder*

The song “We Three Kings” reminds us of the perfect light. “Star of Wonder, star of light, star with royal beauty bright. Westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to Thy perfect light.” Sing the song in your heart and be reminded of the truly unique occurrence of the star of wonder and allow it to lead you to Jesus. Have you felt overwhelmed by joy at any time during this advent season?

## Day 22

### Three Gifts

***“On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.” Matthew 2:11***

Not much is known about these Magi (also called wise men). We don't know where they came from, or how many there were. Tradition says they were men of high position. They traveled very far to see the King of the Jews and when they found him they responded with joy, worship and gifts. This is a different approach than most make today. Most people expect God to come looking for them to explain himself, to prove who He is and to give us gifts.

The three gifts that were given were symbols, gifts given to someone of importance. Gold was more valuable then than now; frankincense was sacred incense and myrrh was used to scent anointing oils. All were very special gifts for a king. Perhaps we can follow the direction of the magi and give only three gifts to our loved ones. A threesome gift idea is to give one prized, one practical and one gift of time.

#### *Prayer*

Father, thank you reminding me of the treasures you have bestowed upon me. Help me to worship You with joy, love and the gift of my obedience. Amen.

#### *Ponder*

The magi gave of their time, money and energy to find the King and to bow down and worship Him. Do you put in as much effort in your walk with Jesus as the magi did?



## Day 23

### Prince of Peace

***"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6***

So often we, His children, are fearful in allowing Him full access to our lives. Yet, if we could fully understand His promises to us, in allowing Him to be our Lord, we would discover the wellness and wholeness He intends for each of us. Peace, true peace.

Inner peace in the midst of even the greatest of storms. Because we trust this One ... this Prince of Peace in our lives, we have an inner assurance that He is in control, and will bring to pass, the very best in, and for our lives. His peace in our lives, will keep us *"sound"*, meaning: *unshakable, thorough, complete, unbroken, undisturbed, free from moral defect, upright, levelheaded. content and complete* (taken from American Heritage Dictionary). His peace will bring quietness to our lives. *"Quietness"* from the American Heritage Dictionary means: *Calm and unmoving; still. Free of turmoil and agitation; untroubled, restful; soothing.* We will also find ourselves to be *content*, as we walk in His peace. *Content* from the American Heritage Dictionary means: *Desiring no more than what one has; satisfied.* This is so, because you'll find your contentment in *"HIM"*, and not in the things and/or circumstances taking place in your life. *"HE"* is and will be your contentment.

Such promises are here for us to reach out and take. He desires that we continually walk in such a precious and wonderful state of peace (His peace), however, we must allow Him such liberty in our lives.

#### *Prayer*

Father, I come to You, in the most awesome name of Jesus, that name which is above *"every"* name. I thank You for the promise of Your peace, through the very Prince of Peace, Jesus. I ask Lord that You would help me to place my life in your care and keeping and that I would truly trust you in all areas of my life. Amen

#### *Ponder*

What keeps you from knowing Him as Prince of Peace? Are you allowing fear to rule in your life? Those very fears reveal a lack of trust in Christ's provisions on our behalf. As we trust Him, and believe that He means only good for us, we will enter into His peace, the very peace that passes all understanding.

## Day 24

### The Greatest Gift

***“But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Luke 2:10-12***

Today we celebrate the long-expected promise fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. Love was born at Christmas, and there is no greater gift than the joy that comes from knowing that Christ our Savior was born for the forgiveness of our sins. The Good News is that the birth of Jesus brings salvation for all who believe.

How sad though those worldly gifts remain the focus for so many. They miss the joy in the beautiful words of the angel that the Savior is “for all the people.” It may indeed be news that a Savior has been born, but unless you believe in Him as your Savior, it is not good news. Nothing could please Jesus more than to have everyone come to know that He has saved us from the dreadful punishment for sin ... and that is exactly what He has done for you.

Our joy is the gift of God Himself born to us, wrapped in cloths and laid in the manger. He is the greatest gift given to all people, and for those who believe, He is the greatest gift received.

#### *Prayer*

I give thanks to you God, with a grateful heart for the precious gift of your Son, Jesus Christ. I celebrate this day that Jesus, our promised Savior, has come to save me. Amen.

#### *Ponder*

This is the eve of something wonderful- the eve of celebrating the nearness and closeness of Immanuel. It may not be a silent night outside or a silent night in your life, but can you find a silent place in your heart as you reflect on this Holy infant so tender and mild? If you have focused on His love peace and joy, then all is calm and bright tonight in your heart.

## Day 25

### The Savior Reigns

***“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy.” Titus 3:4-5***

You’ve probably all heard the following lyrics: “He knows if you’ve been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake.” Santa has become known for rewarding the good and punishing the bad. After all, this is the way the world works and Santa is a very worldly guy.

Fortunately, Jesus doesn’t work that way at all! Scripture tells us that, apart from Jesus, “there is no one righteous, not even one” (Romans 3:10). If our salvation depended on the theory of Santa, then no one would be saved ... because no one could ever be good enough to earn salvation on his or her own merit. Jesus saved us because He is merciful, not because we deserved it. Jesus knows exactly how full of sin we are, and yet He came to save us at great personal cost. No wonder Paul tells Titus about the “kindness and love of God our Savior.”

Santa might be a symbol for kindness and generosity, but he can’t compare to Jesus. You can truly put your faith in Jesus and never be disappointed.

#### *Prayer*

Happy birthday Jesus! Thank you for coming into this world to save me from sin and destruction. I celebrate the changes you make in my life daily as I surrender to your will. I ask that you help me to remain focused on your will and ways and not those of the world that seek to defeat me. You are my Lord and savior. I am so grateful for your love and mercy. In Jesus name, Amen.

#### *Ponder*

*As you take a few moments on this busy day to reflect on Jesus’ birth, have you felt his presence and the peace this Advent season? You can give Him the gift of seeking His face, focusing your hearts, and finding His purpose for your life as you end Advent and head into a new year.*