

THE MESSAGE OF THE MANGER

A Daily Family Advent Study



By Marty Elwell

Illustrations by Rebecca Moseley



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The Message of the Manger

A Daily Family Advent Study

Setting aside the month before Christmas to reflect on Jesus' coming has been a tradition since the 6th century and is referred to as Advent. The word "advent" comes from the Latin and means "the coming."

The Message of the Manger booklet continues in the Advent tradition with a daily Bible reading from November 30 to December 26. After reading the Scripture, the questions should be answered and discussed. There is also a daily focus verse which can be memorized.

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December 26

The Second Coming: Returning in Glory



The first coming of Jesus was marked by him humbly taking the form of a man to serve and save mankind. He came as a vulnerable baby and lived a life as we do. When Jesus comes again, he will come in great power and glory and every eye will see him. Just as there were prophecies related to his first coming, there are prophecies of his second coming, Matthew 16:27 says, *"For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done."*

BIBLE READING: Acts 1:1-11

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: What did the disciples ask Jesus when they met together? (6) What was his response? (7) What did Jesus tell the disciples they were to be? (8) What happened after he spoke to them? (9) What did the angels say to the disciples? (11)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: According to this reading, how would you describe the second coming of Jesus? Why should you look forward to his second coming? How should you be ready for it?

PRAYER: Thank Jesus that he will come again in great glory. Thank him for first coming and dying for you so you could experience great joy at his second coming. Pray that you will live a life worthy of him.

FOCUS VERSE: 1 Peter 1:13

Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled, set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

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November 30

Old Testament Prophecy: God's Word is trustworthy



In looking at the great things God has done, we need to know that we can trust his word. As we read the Christmas story, we will relate it back to Old Testament prophecy that foretold the coming of the Messiah (Savior). A prophecy is the foretelling or prediction of what is to come. The birth and death of Jesus fulfilled many of the prophecies in the Old Testament; the second

coming of Jesus will fulfill the others.

BIBLE READING: 2 Peter 1:12-21

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: Why did Peter want to refresh the memory of those he was writing to? (14-15) How did Peter know he was not following a cleverly invented story? (16-18) How was the word of the prophets made more certain? (16-18) What should we do as a result? (19) Where does prophecy have its origin? (21) What does that mean for us?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: What are ways people try to discredit the truth of Jesus' coming? Why do people want to discredit Jesus? How is the celebration of Christmas being used for purposes other than honoring God? How can you put your focus at Christmas more on Jesus?

PRAYER: Thank God that the coming of Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. Pray that you would learn more of and trust more in God's word of truth.

FOCUS VERSE: 2 Peter 1:19

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

December 25

Christmas: Celebrating the Birth of the Savior



ACTIVITY: Read or act out the Christmas story from Luke 2:1-20

FAMILY DISCUSSION: Share as a family how Jesus's coming has affected you. What changes have occurred in your life because of your relationship with Jesus? What would your family be like if Jesus had never come?

PRAYER: Take this time to really thank Jesus for his coming and all that he has done for you.

FOCUS VERSE: John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

December 24

The First Born: Reconciling Us to God



As we look forward to celebrating the birth of Christ tomorrow, we want to remember the "Message of the Manger." The Apostle Paul shares the essence of who Christ is and his ministry in his letter to the Colossians.

BIBLE READING: Colossians 1:15-23

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: Who is Christ the image of? (15) What are the things he did and does do? (16-20) What does reconcile mean? How does Christ reconcile us to God? (20-22) What is our role in being reconciled to God through Christ? (23)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: How do we know Jesus is the Messiah (Savior) sent by God? If Jesus is the Messiah, what should be your response to him? Why?

PRAYER: Thank God for showing us so clearly that Jesus is the Messiah through the fulfillment of prophecy, the miracles accompanying his birth and life, and the testimony that he and others gave concerning himself. Pray that your faith would be firmly established, that you would trust completely in Jesus for your salvation and be able to clearly share the hope of the Gospel to others.

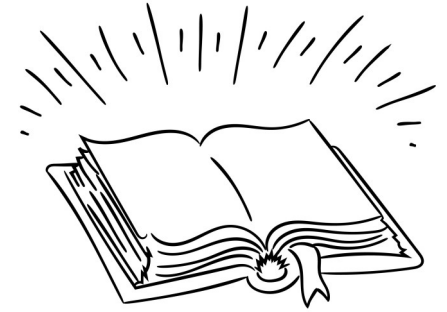
FOCUS VERSE: Colossians 1:19-20

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

December 1

The Gospels: Proclaiming the Truth

During this study, we will examine each person and place involved with the birth of Jesus. We will be reading sections of the Christmas story or related Scriptures, looking at a particular person, place or idea. In this reading we will look at the reasons Luke and John wrote down the things they did about Jesus and his life on earth.



BIBLE READING: Luke 1:1-4, 1 John 1:1-7

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: Where did Luke get the things he wrote down? (1-3) Why did Luke write down the things he did? (4) How did John know the things he was telling others? (1-3) Why did John write these things down? (3-4) What does John say is the message? (5-6) What is the light? What happens if we walk in the light? (7)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: Why do you believe you can trust what Luke and John wrote down? What will believing the things they wrote do for you? What does it mean to walk in the light? Why is walking in the light critical for having fellowship with God and other believers?

PRAYER: Thank God for the men who wrote down the message that they saw and heard. Pray that you would trust and follow the message as they did, walk in the light, and be cleansed from your sin so that nothing would separate you from Christ.

FOCUS VERSE: 1 John 1:2

The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

December 2

Zechariah: Doubting What God Says



The Gospel of Luke begins with the priest Zechariah being told that he would have a son who would go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and people back to the Lord God. This was to fulfill the prophecy in Malachi 4:5, "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes." Zechariah's son, John the Baptist, was not Elijah, but he functioned like Elijah as we will see later in the study.

BIBLE READING: Luke 1:5-25

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: Why was Zechariah serving in the temple? (5-9) How did Zechariah respond when the angel appeared to him? (12) What did the angel say to Zechariah? (13-17) What did Zechariah say to the angel? (18) What happened to him because of his doubt? (19-20) What happened to Elizabeth when Zechariah returned home? (24)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: Why did Zechariah have trouble believing the angel? How does God speak to us? What are ways we doubt what God has to say to us? What are the consequences of not believing God? How do we show that we don't always believe what God says?

PRAYER: Thank God that he continues to speak to you through his Word. Pray that you would believe and obey his word and then be able to share it with others. Pray that you would recognize the destructive consequences that come from not believing and obeying God.

FOCUS VERSE: Hebrews 11:1.
Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what

December 23

The Suffering Servant: Bearing our Sin

When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he referred to him as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." The prophet Isaiah foretold what this sacrificial lamb or suffering servant would do for us. The message of the manger always leads to the cross of Christ. Jesus did not remain a baby; he came to fulfill the Father's plan by living a perfect life and dying for our sin to reconcile us to God. Reconcile means to bring back together on right terms.

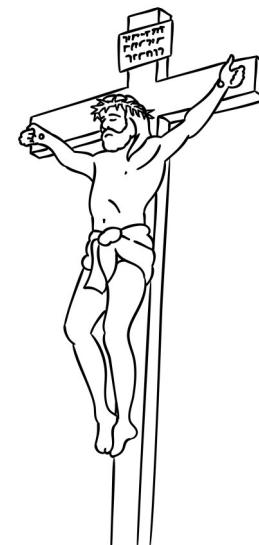
BIBLE READING: Isaiah 53

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: What would the servant of the Lord look like? (2) How would people treat him? (3) What would happen to him? (4-5) How would he respond to the things that were done to him? (7) What would be the result of his suffering? (10-12)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: Why would God's servant be rejected and despised? Would you be willing to suffer and die for people who rejected and despised you? Explain. Why was Christ willing to suffer for sinful people? What have we gained through Christ's willingness to suffer and die? (Romans 5:6-11)

PRAYER: Thank Jesus for having such a great love for you and all people that he was willing to suffer and die. Thank him for taking your sins on himself that you might be forgiven and find peace.

FOCUS VERSE: Isaiah 53:5
But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.



December 22

The Word: Coming in the Flesh



As we look at the manger and the birth of Jesus it is very important to remember who Jesus is. We can look at the baby in the manger and forget that he is the God of the Universe and the Creator of all things, who took the form of a man so that he could show us the way to the Father and save us from our sins. John begins his gospel, not telling the Christmas story, but sharing who Jesus is.

BIBLE READING: John 1:1-34

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: Who is the Word? (1) How long has the Word existed? (1-2) What is in the Word? (4) What does the Word give to those who receive him? (12) What came through Moses? (16) What does that mean? What comes through Jesus? (17) What does that mean? Who did John the Baptist say he is? (23) Who did John say Jesus is? (29) What does that mean?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: Why is Jesus referred to as the Word? What is the purpose of the Word? How do you know the Word is God? Who are the three persons of God? How is the trinity (the three persons of God) evident in verses 32-34? (Note: The three persons of God make up the one, true God, in the way the three dimensions of a book make up just one book. You can't take away one of the dimensions and still have the book.)

PRAYER: Thank the Father that he sent his Son as a man to show you who God is and to save you from the penalty of your sin. Pray that you would understand his truth and walk in his light. Thank Jesus for giving you his Holy Spirit to work in you and deliver you from the power of sin.

FOCUS VERSE: John 1:14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

December 3

Mary: Walking by Faith

The angel Gabriel visited a young woman named Mary, whom God had chosen to be the mother of his Son. As you read the passage keep in mind the prophecy from Isaiah 7:14, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." A virgin is a woman who has never been married and has not had relations with a man.



BIBLE READING: Luke 1:26-38

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: How did Gabriel greet Mary? (28) How did Mary respond? (29) What did Gabriel say would happen to Mary? (30-31) What did he say this Son would be like? (32-33) Why did Mary doubt what the angel said? (34) How did Gabriel say Mary would conceive? (35-37) What did Mary say then? (38) What did that show about Mary?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: How would you describe Mary's character? Mary would suffer great shame for having a child without being married. Why didn't that seem to matter to her? What can you learn from Mary?

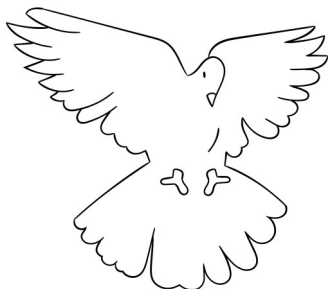
PRAYER: Pray that you would keep your eyes set on God and what he wants. Pray that you would not let the thinking of the world influence your thoughts and actions, but that you would be devoted to serving God and doing his will like Mary was.

FOCUS VERSE: Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

December 4

Elizabeth: Being Filled with the Spirit



After the angel Gabriel came to her, Mary went to visit her relative Elizabeth, who was married to Zechariah. It is important to remember what Gabriel had told Zechariah about his son John. We see from what happened when the women greeted each other that John was filled with the Holy Spirit even in Elizabeth's womb. The Holy Spirit is often represented by a dove, as the Spirit came down in the form of a dove when Jesus was baptized.

BIBLE READING: Luke 1:39-56

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: What happened when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting? (41-44) What did Elizabeth say to Mary? (42-45) What does that show about Elizabeth? What did Mary say about God? (46-55) What does that show about Mary?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? What showed that Elizabeth and Mary were filled with the Holy Spirit? Why is it so important to be filled with the Spirit? What shuts the Holy Spirit out of a person's life?

PRAYER: Pray that you would be filled continually with God's Spirit, that you would honor and glorify him by doing his will. Pray that you would be aware of any sin in your life that would separate you from the presence and power of the Holy Spirit and that you would want to turn away from sin and do what God wants.

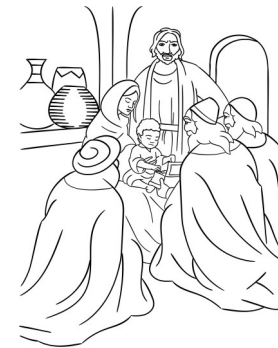
FOCUS VERSE: Romans 8:5

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

December 21

The Child: Given to Us

As we have now finished the story of Jesus' birth and childhood, in the last four days before Christmas we want to gain an expanded perspective of the baby in the manger. We want to look more closely at who Jesus is and his purpose for coming to earth. Isaiah foretold of Christ's coming and said that its impact would extend far into the future.



BIBLE READING: Isaiah 9:1-7

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: Who would God honor? (1) What would the people walking in darkness see? (2) What would be shattered? (4) What is a yoke and what does it do? Who would be born? (6) What would be the names by which the child is called? (6) What would there be no end to? (7)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: Think through how Jesus fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah.

- Verse 1: What area of Judea did Jesus come from? (Matt. 4:12-13)
- Verse 2: What did Jesus refer to himself as being? (John 8:12)
- Verse 4: What did Jesus say would set the people free? (John 8:32) What did he say about his yoke? (Matt. 11:28) Why is everyone under a yoke? (Rom. 6:16)
- Verse 6: How do the names by which the child would be called relate to Jesus? (The verses in parentheses refer to what Jesus said about himself to his disciples.)
 Wonderful Counselor (John 16:7-8)
 Mighty God (John 14:6-7)
 Everlasting Father (John 16:28)
 Prince of Peace (John 16:33)
- Verse 7: Why is there no end to Christ's kingdom? (John 18:36, 2 Peter 1:11)

PRAYER: Thank God that his Word is true and that you can put your trust in him. Thank him for giving prophecies as to the coming of the Messiah and that those prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus.

FOCUS VERSE: Isaiah 9:6

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.

December 20

The Temple: Seeking the Presence of God



The story of Jesus' birth and infancy ends with him going back to Nazareth. Luke is the only Gospel writer who relates something of Jesus' childhood when he tells what happened to Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem when he was twelve years old. Twelve was the age when a boy began to prepare to take his place in the religious community the following year. The temple was the place where the Jewish people sought the Lord. Psalms 27:4 says, "One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple."

Jesus, later in his ministry, compares himself to the temple. In Matthew 12:6 he says, "I tell you that one greater than the temple is here." In John 2:19 when asked about his authority to cleanse the temple of the money changers he said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." Jesus, of course, was referring to his body as the temple that would be destroyed on the cross and then raised from the dead three days later. The wonderful gift that God has given us through the death of Christ is that we, too, can become a temple where the living God dwells. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:16, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" God's temple is where God's Spirit dwells. Christ is greater than the temple because he is the living God.

BIBLE READING: Luke 2:41-52

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: Why did Jesus' family go to Jerusalem? (41) Where did they find Jesus when he was lost? (46) What did Jesus say to them when they questioned him about where he was? (49) How did he refer to the temple? (49) What did Jesus do when he returned to Nazareth? (31-32)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: What does this story show about Jesus? What can you learn from this story?

PRAYER: Thank Jesus that he made a way for us to be continually in God's presence. Pray that his Spirit would dwell in you, that you might be a temple of the living God, and would continually seek his presence..

FOCUS VERSE: Psalms 27:4

One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.

December 5

John the Baptist: Living for God

After Mary left, Elizabeth gave birth to a son as the angel had said she would. Zechariah was able to speak again and gave a great prophecy as to what his son John would do. As you read this passage remember what the angel had told Zechariah he was to name his son in Luke 1:13, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John." He is referred to as John the Baptist because he baptized Jesus and many other people who came to him.



BIBLE READING: Luke 1:57-80; John 1:6-9

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: What happened when Elizabeth said the baby was to be named John? (59) What did Zechariah do when they asked him? (63) What happened after he wrote that? (64) What did Zechariah say about John? (76-77) What did he say about the coming Messiah? (68-79) What does the disciple John say that John the Baptist came to do? (John 1:7)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: The name John (derived from the Hebrew) means "God is gracious." Gracious means full of mercy and compassion. How does this name apply to John the Baptist and his ministry? What is our greatest enemy? How did the Messiah rescue us from our sin?

PRAYER: Thank God for being so gracious to us and sending his Son to bring us back to him and save us from our sins. Pray that you would understand and accept his gracious gift and fully recognize that your own sin is your greatest enemy. Pray that you would be filled with his Spirit so that you are able to overcome the power of sin in your life.

FOCUS VERSE: Luke 1:68-69

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.

December 6

Joseph: Being Faithful to God's Calling



Luke doesn't say much in his gospel about Joseph, who was pledged to be Mary's husband, so we have to go to the Gospel of Matthew to find out more about him and what he was like. He was a special man, whom God had chosen to be the earthly father of his Son. According to Old Testament prophecy, the Savior was to come from the line of David. Jeremiah 23:5 states, "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will

be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness." It is important to note that both Joseph (Matthew 1:1-16) and Mary (Luke 3:23-38) were descended from David. For the Jews a son's lineage would have been traced through his father, hence Matthew's genealogy, but since Joseph was not the real father of Jesus it had to be shown that Mary was also a descendant of David, hence Luke's genealogy. At the time the angel appeared to Mary, she and Joseph were engaged to be married. An engagement was considered a binding agreement, although they were not yet married

BIBLE READING: Matthew 1:18-25

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: What did Joseph plan to do when he found out Mary was pregnant? (18-19) What did the angel say to him? (20-21) What was Joseph's response? (24-25)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: What shows you that Joseph was righteous? Why would obeying the angel have been difficult for him to do?

PRAYER: Thank God for the faithfulness of Joseph in fulfilling his role in the birth of Jesus. Pray that you would grow in faithfulness to do what God asks of you.

FOCUS VERSE: Matthew 1:20b-21

Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.

December 19

Nazareth: Being Despised and Rejected

Mary and Joseph came from Nazareth and when it was safe they took Jesus back there to live. At the time of Jesus, to call someone a Nazarene (meaning from Nazareth) was the same as saying he was "despised." John 1:45-46 says, "Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked. 'Come and see,' said Philip".



The Old Testament never says that the Savior would be called "a Nazarene" but it does say that the Savior would be despised and rejected. Isaiah 53:3 says, "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

BIBLE READING: Matthew 2:19-23, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: Why did Joseph take Jesus to Nazareth? What things does God choose? Why?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: Why do you think God selected a despised town, instead of a great city like Jerusalem, to be the place where his Son was raised? How was Jesus rejected and despised?

PRAYER: Thank God that he chooses the lowly and despised to show the great work that he can do. Thank God that no one is so low that he can't be raised up if he turns to Christ. Pray that you would be humble and allow God to work in you.

FOCUS VERSE: Isaiah 53:3

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

December 18

Herod: Demonstrating Man's Evil



King Herod was a very wicked man. He could not stand the thought that there was a baby born who might replace him as king. Remember the Magi had referred to the baby as "the King of the Jews." What Herod did to protect his position is an example of the great evil people are capable of committing when they don't fear God. Jeremiah 17:9-10 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? 'I the LORD search the

heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.'" In the end Herod received the due punishment for his evil.

BIBLE READING: Matthew 2:16-18

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: What did Herod do when he realized the Magi had outwitted him? (16) Why do you think he did that? What had Jeremiah the prophet said about that? (18) (Note: Rachel was the Patriarch Jacob's favorite wife. She was the mother of Joseph and Benjamin. From Joseph came the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, which were the two most prominent and powerful tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel. The use of the name Rachel would personify the nation of Israel.)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: What drives men like Herod to be so cruel? What happened to him when he faced God in judgment? How can you relate what Herod was like as a person to the reason Jesus came to earth?

PRAYER: Thank Jesus for coming to cleanse our hearts so that we can follow after God rather than give in to our own wickedness. Pray that Jesus would work in your heart, cleansing it of all that would hurt you and others.

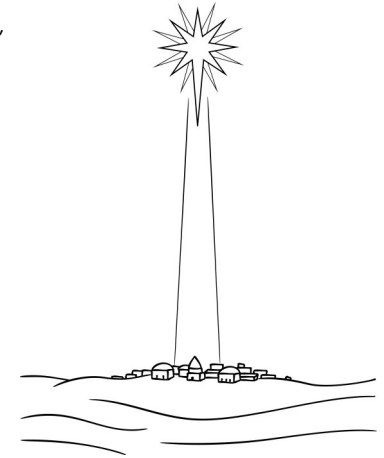
FOCUS VERSE: Jeremiah 17:9-10

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? 'I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.'

December 7

Bethlehem: Becoming Great through Humility

When Jesus came to earth the first time, everything surrounding his birth showed he came as a humble servant. Mary and Joseph were humble, obedient people. Bethlehem, the town of David where the prophet Micah said the Savior would be born, was a humble little town about five miles south of Jerusalem. Micah 5:2 says, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." To fulfill the prophecy of the Messiah's birth, Jesus had to be born in Bethlehem, but Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth of Galilee. The Roman census required Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem, otherwise Jesus would have been born in Nazareth and would not have fulfilled the prophecy. This demonstrates that God has control over human history. Psalm 22:28 states, "for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations."



BIBLE READING: Luke 2:1-7

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: Why did Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem? (1-4) (A census is taken to count the number of people living in a country or area.) Why did Mary have to put the baby in a manger for a bed? (7) Why wouldn't there have been room for them anywhere else?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: What do the circumstances surrounding Christ's birth show you? Why do you think God did things that way? What kind of savior or king would most people have been looking for? Why?

PRAYER: Thank God that Jesus came as a humble, submissive servant to fulfill his plans and die for your sins. Pray that you would learn to be humble and submissive to God's will like Jesus was. Thank Jesus that he is a heavenly king, who reigns forever.

FOCUS VERSE: Micah 5:2

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

December 8

The Manger: Cradling God's Humble Servant



As we look at the scene in the stable we want to evaluate the surroundings into which Christ was born. In the last reading we read that Mary wrapped Jesus in cloths and placed him in a manger. A manger is a trough that animals feed from. There, in the manger, lay the God of all creation who has all the resources of the entire universe in his hands. In this reading in Philippians we see God's purpose in that humble beginning.

BIBLE READING: Philippians 2:1-11

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: How did Paul say the Philippians could make his joy complete? (2-3) What should our attitude be the same as? (5) What was Christ's attitude? (6-7) What did he do out of obedience? (8) What was the result? (9-11)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: How can we have the same attitude as Christ? What will our lives be like if we have that attitude? What does it mean to be humble? Why does God want us to be humble? Why is the manger a symbol of humility?

PRAYER: Thank God that Christ humbled himself and came to die for you. Pray that God would work that same humble spirit in you, so that you might be made useful for his work and that he would be honored and glorified through your life.

FOCUS VERSE: Philippians 2:5-7.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

December 17

Egypt: Calling Out of Captivity

Only the Gospel of Matthew relates Mary and Joseph taking the Christ child to Egypt to protect his life. At the time of the Patriarchs, Egypt was a place of refuge for the Israelites when God led Jacob and his family there to escape a famine. It became a place of captivity as the people were made slaves by the pharaoh. God sent his prophet Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery. Jesus came out of Egypt and leads us out of captivity and slavery to our own sin. Galatians 5:1 says, *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."*



BIBLE READING: Matthew 2:13-15

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: Why did Joseph take Jesus and Mary to Egypt? (13) How long did they stay? (15) What prophecy did Joseph taking his family to Egypt fulfill? (15)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: What do you see as the significance of Jesus being taken to Egypt and then brought back?

ADDITIONAL READING: Acts 7:1-36 This reading gives a brief history of the Israelites that puts their time in Egypt into context. Why did the people go to Egypt? (Acts 7:11-15) What happened to them in Egypt? (Acts 7:17-19) How were they brought out of slavery? (Acts 7:35-36)

PRAYER: Thank God that he leads us out of captivity to our sin by the grace and power of his love. Thank Jesus for being your Savior.

FOCUS VERSE: Galatians 5:1

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

December 16

The Star: Leading to the Savior



After meeting with king Herod, the Magi continued to follow the star to the place where they found Jesus with his mother. They gave valuable gifts to the child. The fact that three gifts are listed has given rise to the legend that there were three Magi. Just as the light of the star guided the Magi to Jesus, so the light of Jesus guides us to the truth. 2 Corinthians 4:6 says, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

BIBLE READING: Matthew 2:9-12

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: How did the Magi find Jesus? (9-10) Where was Jesus? (11) What were the gifts they gave Jesus? (11) Why didn't they go back to Herod? (12)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: The following is a description of the gifts the Magi brought to Jesus. Discuss what you think is the significance of each.

- Myrrh was an aromatic gum extracted from the leaves of a special plant. It was used in beauty treatments (Ester 2:12). It was mixed with wine and offered to Jesus on the cross as a pain reliever (Mark 15:23) and was also applied to Jesus' body after his death. (John 19:39-40)]
- Incense is an aromatic compound burned on special occasions. People all over the world have used it in religious rituals. The Israelites burned it in the temple. The burning of incense only has meaning to God when our hearts are right with him. (Jer. 6:19-20) The burning of incense in Scripture is often a symbol of prayer. (Psalm 141:2)]
- Gold is a precious metal and has been used throughout history as a standard of exchange. The tabernacle and the temple in Jerusalem were decorated with gold in honor of God. In scripture many things are said to have greater value than gold: wisdom (Prov. 3:13-14), God's law (Psalm 119:72) and faith (1 Pet. 1:7).]

PRAYER: Thank God for sending Jesus as his light to lead you into his truth and save you from your sins. Pray that you would fully recognize the value of the gift that God has given you through Jesus and that his light would shine in you so you can lead others to him.

December 9

The Angels: Announcing the Birth

We have already seen the role that the angel Gabriel had in visiting Zechariah and Mary. Now we see that a whole host of angels appeared to a humble group of shepherds at the birth of Christ. The shepherds were told by an angel where they could find the Savior who had been born. We think of angels as being radiant representatives of God. Hebrews 1:3-4 tells us that Christ is so much more than the angels. "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs."



BIBLE READING: Luke 2:8-14

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: What happened to the shepherds when they saw the angel? (9) What did the angel say to them? (10-12) What happened after the angel spoke? (13-14)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: Why do you think God sent the angels to a group of shepherds? Why are people so terrified at the presence of an angel? Is God always present with us? In what way? Are we always in awe of his presence? Should we be? How would we show we are in awe of his presence?

PRAYER: Pray that you would understand more fully how great and glorious God is. Pray that you would grow in awe and be aware of the majesty of his presence in all aspects of your life. Thank God that his peace fills us as we trust and obey him.

FOCUS VERSE: Hebrews 1:3-4.

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

December 10

The Shepherds: Believing the Message



Once they got over their terror, the shepherds must have been awestruck when the heavenly host appeared to them. Their response was to go and see what they had been told. They believed and so they obeyed. We too must believe the message and obey the Word of God. Obedience to God's message shows love for him. Jesus says in John 14: 23, *"If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."*

BIBLE READING: Luke 2:15-20

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: What did the shepherds do after they heard the message? (15-16) What did they do after they had seen Jesus? (17, 20)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: What showed that the shepherds believed what the angel had told them? What should always follow belief? Why? After they saw Jesus, what showed that the shepherds believed the truth about Jesus? What can you learn from the shepherds?

PRAYER: Thank God for his message that comes through Jesus. Pray that you would truly love Jesus and demonstrate that love by obeying what he commands. Pray that you would be full of his love and share his word and love with others.

FOCUS VERSE: John 14:23

If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

December 15

The Wise Men: Seeking the Savior

Our reading now shifts back to the Gospel of Matthew, as Matthew relates part of the Christmas story that Luke doesn't. Matthew doesn't say much about the birth of Christ, instead, he focuses on what happened after. Matthew is the one who relates the story of the Magi (Wise Men) coming from the east. Although we can't be certain, the Magi were probably astrologers who studied the stars and were advisors to the King of Persia. They were not present at the manger scene as they had to travel some distance to find Jesus. God wants us to seek him as the Magi sought the king born to the Jews. Isaiah 55:6-7 says, *"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon."*



BIBLE READING: Matthew 2:1-8

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: Where did the Magi come from? (1) Why did they go to Jerusalem? (2) What did the Magi call the one they were seeking? (2) How did Herod determine where the baby was? (3-5) What did Herod tell the Magi to do? (8)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: What is impressive about the Magi? What can you learn from them?

PRAYER: Thank God that the Magi recognized the importance of the star and sought to find Jesus. Pray that you, too, would recognize the importance of the truth and seek Jesus with all your heart.

FOCUS VERSE: Isaiah 55:6-7

Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

December 14

Simeon: Seeing with his Eyes the Precious Savior



After Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph fulfilled what the Jewish law said to do after the birth of a son. They had Jesus circumcised on the eighth day. After 40 days of a purification period, they went to the temple in Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice for their first born son. There in the temple they met a special man, Simeon, who had been waiting to see the Savior before he died. Simeon praised God in a wonderful way when he saw with his eyes what God had promised. We, too, need

to see with our eyes the majesty of who Christ is and what he has done for us. Ephesians 1:17-19a says, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe."

BIBLE READING: Luke 2:21-40

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: Why was Simeon at the temple when Mary and Joseph went there? (25-27) What was his praise to God? (29-32) What did he say to Mary about the baby? (34-35) How did Anna respond to Jesus? (38)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: What do you think it was like for Simeon and Anna to see Jesus? Why did so few other people see Jesus with the same eyes as they did?

PRAYER: Pray for eyes that see clearly what God has given you through his Son. Pray for humility so that you would see your own sin and would receive all that Christ wants to give you.

FOCUS VERSE: Luke 2:30-32

For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

December 11

The Donkey: Bearing the Savior

We do not know for sure what animals were in the stable when Jesus was born, but we can imagine that there were perhaps a donkey and some sheep and these are the animals we will look at in this study. It is likely that Mary rode on a donkey from Nazareth to Bethlehem since she was pregnant. A donkey plays an important role in prophecy concerning the Savior. Zechariah 9:9 says, "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation,

gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." This prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus entered Jerusalem during the last week of his ministry. When we look at the donkey in the manger scene we want to remember what Jesus came to do.

BIBLE READING: Luke 19:28-44

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: What did Jesus ride into Jerusalem? (35) What did the people do as he was riding by? (36-38) How did the Pharisees respond to that?(39) What did Jesus say would happen if he told his disciples to be quiet?(40) Why did Jesus weep over Jerusalem?(42-44) What does that show about Jesus?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: With all the miracles Jesus performed and all that he taught the people, why did the Pharisees fail to see him as the Messiah (Savior)? What did they fail to receive as a result? (Note: The Pharisees followed the law of God on the outside in what they did, but they weren't right on the inside.)

PRAYER: Thank God that you are able to see that Jesus is the Savior who is worthy of all praise. Pray that you would help others to see who Jesus is.

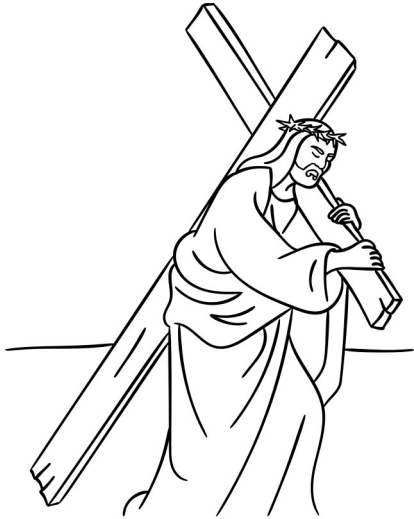
FOCUS VERSE: Luke 19:38

Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!



December 12

Lamb of God: Taking Away the Sins of the World



Having sheep in the manger scene reminds us of two things. First, Jesus is the sacrificial lamb that takes away the sin of the world. John 1:29 says, "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" The sheep also remind us that we as a people are lost sheep in need of a shepherd who will protect and lead us to safety. In this reading we will look at Jesus as the Lamb of God and in the next reading we will look at Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

BIBLE READING: Hebrews 9:19-22, 1 Peter 1:17-21

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: What does the law require everything to be cleansed with? (Heb. 9:22) Why? How were we redeemed from our empty way of life? (1 Pet. 1:18-21) Why are we able to have faith and hope in God? (1 Pet. 1:21)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: What is sin? What does our sin do to us? Why did Jesus have to be sacrificed for our sin? Blood carries life-giving oxygen and nutrients to every cell in the body. It also takes away the waste materials and toxins that would poison our bodies and cause death. How is that similar to what Christ's blood does for us spiritually?

PRAYER: Thank Jesus that he came as a perfect sacrificial lamb to shed his blood for us, so that we can be forgiven for our sin. Pray that you would always remember this great gift, recognize your sin, and want to be made clean.

FOCUS VERSE: 1 Peter 1:18-19.

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

December 13

The Lost Sheep: Needing a Shepherd

Looking at the sheep in the stable reminds us not only that Jesus is the Lamb of God, it also reminds us that we are lost sheep in need of a shepherd. In Micah 5:4-5a a prophecy about the Savior says, "He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace." Sheep are not very smart animals and if they don't have a shepherd watching over them they can easily get lost and into all kinds of trouble. 1 Peter 2:25 describes our condition, "For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." The reading from John shows us how Jesus is our shepherd and takes care of us.



BIBLE READING: John 10:11-18

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: How does Jesus describe himself? (11) What will the good shepherd do for his sheep? (11) How are the sheep to respond to the shepherd? (16)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: Besides laying down his life for us, how has Jesus shown he is the good shepherd? How do we listen to his voice? What will be the result?

PRAYER: Thank Jesus that he is your shepherd who leads you into all truth. Thank him that he watches over, protects, and guides you by his truth and his Spirit. Pray that you would listen to his voice and obey his word.

FOCUS VERSE: Micah 5:4-5a.

He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace.