

Messiah, Not Mayhem: Grow Closer to Jesus in 22 Days

ADVENT 2017

Introduction

Christ is Coming

Several years ago, I unpacked a blue rubber box bursting with Christmas décor. Like the majority of my tchotchkes, they are hand-me-downs from my grandma. While most of the trinkets were holiday traditionals like wooden reindeer, glittery angels, and an old-fashioned Santa, stuck down in the bottom of the box was a metal, silver-colored Advent wreath.

Admittedly, I had no true understanding of Advent despite attending a denominational church that celebrated Advent each Christmas season. I can still recall sitting in the creaky, wooden pew when I was a little girl and watching a family walk up on the platform each week to read a Bible verse and light a candle. That's about as far as my knowledge extended.

But for some reason, that particular year I felt compelled to understand Advent more. I did some studying, and I also found a Christmas devotional online. I bought a \$3 package of Advent candles and stuck them in the holders (using a little Scotch tape to keep them upright). Each night, my husband would light a candle and read the devotional, and we'd pray together with our two sons—ages one and two at the time. I'd take a quick photo of the boys in their jammies next to the illuminated wreath and then we'd tuck the boys in bed (until they got out of bed...so we tucked them in tighter).

Two more boys later (for a grand total of four—and no, we're not trying for a basketball team *or* for a girl), we're now approaching our fourth Christmas celebrating Advent. In Latin, *Adventus* means "coming," and this is where we derive our English word *Advent*. While "Advent" isn't found directly in Scripture, we are reminded by Paul in Philippians 3:20 (NIV) to "eagerly await a Savior [from heaven]." In context, Paul was speaking of Jesus' second coming, not His birth, but this is why Advent has a dual meaning for believers today. We not only have the blessing of celebrating His birth, but we look forward to His coming to take us to heaven with Him. Maranatha (come, Lord Jesus)!

Celebrating Christ

In our home, we use Advent as an opportunity to keep ourselves intentionally fettered to the Messiah, despite the mayhem. America has done a marvelous job marketing the holiday gift-giving and food while being tragically surrounded by death, pain, and sin. This world is desperate for Christ, but doesn't even know it. As believers, we should be burdened for the lost (Romans 9:1—5) and be a light to a dark world. **There's nothing more this world needs than to know Christ and to have Him rooted deeply within the soul.** May we boldly proclaim our Lord Jesus Christ though out the year, but may we also not fail to use this sacred season to renew our spirit in Him.

Structuring Your Time

There's no formula or configuration for how to best celebrate Christ. That's the beauty of worship: **God didn't specify how to worship; He simply provided Scriptural examples of worship.** In John 4:24, we're told to worship in Spirit and in truth. What a relief to know we don't need to make this a legalistic list of to-dos! This Advent study of Christ's birth and salvation isn't designed to dictate—it was prayerfully created to guide you in establishing cherished time to reflect on Christ Jesus.

For the majority of the days, we'll be in the book of either Matthew or Luke, studying the **verse-by-verse** story of Jesus' birth. Toward the end of Advent, we'll glean from a few verses that speak to the character of Christ Jesus, the wickedness of mankind, Jesus' righteousness, and the merciful gift of His grace.

If you're new to **verse-by-verse studies**, it's an edifying approach for the following reasons:

- We are to proclaim the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27, NKJV)—not just pieces and parts.
- Verses are left in context and each verse can be considered in light of the surrounding verses.
- It allows us to stay focused on one emphasis over a period of time as opposed to jumping from topic to topic.
- It encourages you to do your own Bible study. You don't have to be a pastor or teacher to study the Word!

Each day there is a **reading** (in the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted), **reflection**, and **response**. Again, my encouragement to you is to make the reflection and response your own. What I've penned is scripted from my heart to yours; you must then choose to ponder its application for yourself.

For households or fellowships with wee ones, I've included a brief **Tot Time** section, which consists of explanations and/or questions to help reinforce the Scripture. **It's imperative to not dilute the Gospel when teaching children. Help them listen to the Bible verse, just as you would, and then work with them to clarify.** We're prompted in Deuteronomy 6:7 to teach God's Word to the children, talking about it when we sit at home, walk around, lie down, and wake up.

You can choose to read these thoughts each day without an Advent wreath. It's not the material we use that matter, but the motive of our heart. However, if you do use Advent candles, I will share with you the meaning of each of the candles, and the order in which you can light them:

- **Week One** (starts December 3): Light a purple Advent candle. Purple signifies *expectation* and *hope*. It calls attention to the fact that God is our Hope, Redeemer, and Savior.
- **Week 2** (starts December 10): Light the original purple candle, plus one more purple candle. The second candle signifies *preparation* and *peace*. We are to prepare our hearts to accept the grace and peace of God through Jesus Christ.
- **Week 3** (starts December 17): Light the two purple candles from previous weeks, plus the pink candle. Pink signifies *proclamation* and *joy*. Proclaim His Truth and as it says in Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lords always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”
- **December 24**: Light the two purple candles, the pink candle, and the last purple candle. The final purple candle signifies *revelation* and *peace*. We celebrate the announcement of our King, Jesus Christ, and the greatness of His love. He sacrificed all for our eternal peace with Him.

- **December 25:** On Christmas morning, light all the candles. If you have a white candle (which doesn't typically come in the pack of Advent candles), you can light one. White represents the spotless nature of Christ and reminds us how He washed our sin away.

No matter how you choose to celebrate Christ this season, let the Messiah—not the mayhem—reign in your heart. May you be richly blessed in Him!

Week 1: Sunday, December 3

Read: Luke 1:11—17

*¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. ¹⁶ He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And **he will go on before the Lord**, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to **make ready a people prepared for the Lord.**"*

Reflect: Merriam-Webster helps us define the word *prepare*: "to make ready beforehand for some purpose, use, or activity." Just as John the Baptist was sent before Jesus to prepare the hearts of the people for the Lord, we must also prepare our own hearts for His coming and make ready the way for others.

Respond: Gracious Lord, fill me with Your Spirit and prepare my heart this season. Anchor me so I'm not distracted by the noise and the hustle around me. I want my heart to be still so I can clearly hear Your righteous Word and obediently respond.

Tot Time: Holiday baking creates wonderful memories. Talk with the wee ones about a time they baked a cake or cookies with you (or someone they know) and walk them through how all the ingredients were gathered, the oven was preheated, hands were washed, etc. Each of those acts were *preparation* (getting ready) for what they were about to do. In the same way, we want our own heart to be ready so we can hear His instructions. How can we get everything ready so we hear from God?

Monday, December 4

Read: Luke 1:26—33

*²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, **you who are highly favored!** The Lord is with you."*

*²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and **you are to call him Jesus.** ³² He will be great and will be called the **Son of the Most***

High. *The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."*

Reflect: First off, *you* are highly favored. Favor wasn't just for the mother of Jesus. God saw fit to seek you out and use you for His purpose, just like Mary. This was the work of the Holy Spirit in you. The Son of the Most High is not only your Savior; He sits on His throne and has granted you citizenship in His eternal kingdom. Oh, how glorious!

Respond: Savior of the world, thank You for preparing my heart and sending Your Spirit to speak to my brokenness. You were sent to this earth for me, and I want to not only honor You as my King, but also remember that You are Most High and Most Holy. I stand in awe of You.

Tot Time: Talk about the child's name and how it was given to him or her. Then, teach the child how Jesus' name means "God saves" and how God named His Son, just like the child was named. Names are a special gift and are given in love—just like God gave Jesus to the earth as an act of love.

Tuesday, December 5

Read: Luke 1:42—45

*⁴² In a loud voice she [Elizabeth] exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ **Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!**"*

Reflect: The word *blessed* means "happy." The Bible is filled with encouraging and inspiring promises to you, and when you choose to believe them, happiness leaps forth. This doesn't refer to the "happiness" we're accustomed to hearing about that (supposedly) comes through possessions, money, and fancy cars. No, this is a deep-seated peace and grounding, a joy that only Christ can offer through knowing Him as Savior and Lord (the Supreme One). If you haven't made the choice to wholeheartedly follow Christ, delay it no longer! You don't need to repeat an eloquent prayer or wait until Sunday morning—simply confess to God that you believe in His Son, the *gift* of salvation He offers, and what His Word declares. Then, go forward with joy, knowing you are blessed.

Respond: Father, You are the Supreme One, and I want to live my life for You. I believe You sent Your only Son, Jesus, to die the death I should've experienced. Thank You for Your gift of grace. I did not earn this eternal gift, and I am not worthy to receive it; but, You give out of pure love, and I'm overwhelmingly grateful. I choose to follow You from this day forward.

Tot Time: Revisit what the word *blessed* means and have the kiddos talk or write out what makes them happy. Then, encourage them to share the gift of happiness with others this next week.

Wednesday, December 6

Read: Luke 1:46—55

⁴⁶ And Mary said:
“My soul glorifies the Lord
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has been mindful
of **the humble state of his servant**.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
⁴⁹ for **the Mighty One has done great things for me—**
holy is his name.
⁵⁰ **His mercy extends to those who fear him,**
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ **He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;**
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”

Reflect: Out of the overflow of Mary’s heart, she praised God. She recalled her unworthiness (verse 48) and His might (verse 49). She speaks of God’s mercy (verse 50) and the deeds He has performed to orchestrate that exact moment (verse 51). Declare His praise today, for He is mindful of you and extends His sweet mercy to you. He has fed you, helped you, and will forever be with you.

Respond: Mighty One, You are beyond comprehension and full of beauty and grace. Thank You for Your extension of love to me and Your priceless gift of salvation. While I am a wretched person, You saw it fit to pursue me. Help me “to live a life worthy of the Lord and please [You] in every way” (Colossians 1:10).

Tot Time: With the children, spend some time making a list of all the things you’re thankful for that God has given. Call out God’s characteristics (i.e., loving, kind, patient, etc.) and write them down.

Thursday, December 7

Read: Luke 2:1—4

¹In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ²(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³And everyone went to their own town to register. ⁴So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

Reflect: We must stop and consider all that God was orchestrating. It was necessary for Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem and have the baby there because it would fulfill the prophecy from Micah

5:2. God is continuously at work on your behalf and the Lord is over all (Colossians 1:15). Let this truth sink in! Just as God prompted Caesar Augustus to conduct a census, so He prompts us to act in accordance to His will.

Respond: Supreme God, how mind-blowing it is to consider all You do. Thank You for threading me into Your beautiful fabric of salvation and using me as an instrument to help prepare and ready others. I'm so glad I'm an heir to the line of Christ.

Tot Time: It was roughly 100 miles from Nazareth (where Mary and Joseph were from) to Bethlehem (where they were traveling to). Back then, there were no trains, planes, or cars. This could've been a scary trip for Mary and Joseph because it would've taken 8—10 days to make the journey. Ask your children these questions: "Do you ever get scared? What are ways to be brave and carry forward, even when you're afraid? What do you think Mary and Joseph did on their journey to keep going?"

Friday, December 8

Read: Luke 2:5—7

*⁵ He [Joseph] went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, **the time came** for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was **no guest room available** for them.*

Reflect: God is never early, or late. Whether or not you've personally experienced birthing a child—know this: when it's time, it's time. There is no holding off or rushing forward; **you must yield to the pace and the place**. Mary wasn't at home or in a posh guest room awaiting the baby's arrival. She was in a crazy-crowded town, hunkered in a stable, giving birth to the salvation of the world. That may not have been what she pictured in her mind when the angel visited her, but it was God's plan. And friends, when it's God's plan—no matter our surroundings or circumstances—it's better to yield and say, "**When it's time, it's time, my Lord.**"

Respond: Perfect Father, how often I want to hold Your hand back or inch it forward to control my world. Yet, you have the best pace and the optimal place. Teach me to willingly yield to Your will and Your way.

Tot Time: Talk about babies being born and what that means to you as a friend, family member, or parent. Remind the little ones how loved they are and how God planned for them to be born. God knew the time and the place. It was just as He wanted!

Saturday, December 9

Read: Luke 2:8—12

*⁸ And there were shepherds **living out in the fields** nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy*

for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Reflect: During Jesus’ day, shepherding was not an upper-crust career. The angels first appeared to people living in fields, not city lofts. What a comfort to know that while the world influences us to “put on a good show,” God’s true desire is humility. Praise God today because He proclaimed to you the good news that caused you great joy!

Respond: Giver of joy, how wonderful it is to declare Your truth of salvation. Thank You for the free gift of grace through Jesus and for bringing me the good news.

Tot Time: Have her or him share about exciting news she or he once received. What made that news so much fun? Parallel this idea with what the shepherds must’ve felt when the angel told them about the Messiah being born.

Week 2: Sunday, December 10

Read: Luke 2:13—14

¹³ Suddenly **a great company of the heavenly host** appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

Reflect: While there’s no definition of what “a great company of the heavenly host” looks like in Scripture, it’s probably no chancel choir. Isaiah 6:3 speaks of the seraphim who surround the throne and call to each other, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.” His favor of salvation rests on you and that is reason enough to praise Him and cry, “Glory to God in the highest heaven!”

Respond: Holy, holy, holy, are you Lord Almighty! Glory to God in the highest! You are worthy to be praised and I continually proclaim Your name.

Tot Time: Talk about what *praise* means and then teach about how we praise God and can also praise and encourage those around us.

Monday, December 11

Read: Luke 2:15—18

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “**Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing** that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ **When they had seen him, they spread the word** concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ **and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.**

Reflect: There are a few key principles in these verses: (1) the shepherds *heard* the Truth; (2) they became *seekers* of the Truth; and, (3) they *told* others about the Truth. **Hear. Seek. Tell.** It’s not a prescription, but it is a worthwhile discipline because we know from verse 18 that “all who heard it were amazed.”

Respond: Father, often I hear, but I don't seek. Or, I hear and seek, but don't tell others. Help me to have complete follow-through and to rightly apply Truth. Let it permeate my entire being so I can confidently tell others who You are and they can be amazed by You.

Tot Time: Have them practice saying: Hear, seek, tell. Explain what each of those words mean. Afterwards, you can pull up *Go Tell It On The Mountain* on your phone and have them sing with you!

Tuesday, December 12

Read: Luke 2:19—20

¹⁹ But Mary **treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.** ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Reflect: It would be difficult to imagine what the past nine months were like for Mary. Being engaged, conceiving a child by the Holy Spirit, traveling a long distance, and experiencing the Savior's birth. Talk about a mind-numbing roller coaster of emotions. No matter how wild your life is, the words in verse 19 are ones to etch on your soul: "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." Mary gave careful thought to all that had happened and what was told to her about this baby named Jesus. Approach this Christmas season—and your daily life—in this same manner. The words Christ speaks to you should be treasures in your heart and ponderings in your minds.

Respond: Lord God, I want to treasure up all the things You speak through Your Word and meditate on them. I want to glorify and praise Your name just like the shepherds, because what You say, You will do.

Tot Time: Chat about what a treasure is and ask the little ones to name a few treasures they have at home. Why are those items special? Talk further about how the Bible is a special treasure and we are to keep it hidden in our heart so we do not sin against God (Psalm 119:11).

We're now headed into the parallel story of Jesus' birth in the book of Matthew, since we've concluded Luke's account.

Wednesday, December 13

Read: Matthew 1:18—19

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet **did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.**

Reflect: To the Jewish people, engagement was equivalent to marriage—except they did not live together or consummate until marriage. If an engaged woman became pregnant, it would've been considered adultery (see Deuteronomy 22:13—21). Therefore, Joseph had decided to "divorce her quietly," which was honorable despite the heartache Joseph must've felt at this time. When you're hurt

or rejected, what's your initial response? Our flesh would want to disgrace the other person (the more public the better!); yet, the heart of Christ is that despite the person's *dishonor*, we chose to *honor God* and move forward quietly.

Respond: Gracious Father, you have dealt with me in patience and love time and again, yet I continually call out the speck of sin in another person's eye. Teach me to love others right where they are and to be patient even when I've been hurt and want to make a public spectacle of them!

Tot Time: Being hurt by someone else is never fun. Talk with the little ones about a time when their feelings were hurt and how it made them feel. How should we respond in these situations? Then, ask them about a time when they've hurt someone else and how they should change their behavior.

Thursday, December 14

Read: Matthew 1:20—21

²⁰ But after he [Joseph] had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "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. ²¹ 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."

Reflect: God informs when the time is right (which isn't typically our timing). Joseph was going to follow-through with the divorce, but God intervened and instructed him otherwise. I love how the Lord reassures us when we're fearful—just like He did with Joseph in saying, "...do not be afraid." Joseph was scared, but God brought Him reassurance and peace and He'll do the same for you.

Respond: Lord, thank you for what Your Word says in Philippians 4:6—7: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, 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." I give you all my scared and anxious thoughts today and ask for Your peace that surpasses all understanding.

Tot Time: Ask the munchkins what it feels like to be afraid and about a time when they were scared. What did they do? Talk with them about Philippians 4:6—7 and how we can tell God *anything* and He is ready to listen and respond to us.

Friday, December 15

Read: Matthew 1:22—25

*²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him **Immanuel**" (which means "**God with us**"). ²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.*

Reflect: Warren Wiersbe talks about the names of Jesus in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary*: "The name *Jesus* means "Savior" and comes from the Hebrew name Joshua ("Jehovah is salvation"). There were

many Jewish boys with the name Joshua (or, in the Greek, Jesus), but Mary's Boy was called "Jesus the Christ." The word *Christ* means "anointed"; it is the Greek equivalent of *Messiah*. He is "Jesus the Messiah." Jesus is His human name; Christ is His official title; and Emmanuel describes who He is—"God with us." Jesus Christ is God! We find this name "Emmanuel" in Isaiah 7:14 and 8:8."

Respond: Mighty God, thank you for sending this world Your own self, wrapped in flesh. Thank you for Jesus Christ—our Salvation and Emmanuel.

Tot Time: God is with us each minute. The Bible tells us in Deuteronomy 31:6 that God will never leave us and that we don't need to be afraid of what goes on around us. What are some ways you can remember that God is with you at all times?

Saturday, December 16

Read: Matthew 2:1—2

¹After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

Reflect: We know little about these magi (wise men). While they came bearing three gifts, that doesn't mean there were only three magi. We can gather from their title that these men were likely astrologers—or a group of scholars who studied the stars. But regardless of their origination, there's one thing we can be certain of: they sought the King. Their desire was to follow the light God provided them and not miss out on worshipping at the feet of Jesus.

Respond: Great King, help me not to miss out at worshipping at Your feet. Not only in this spirited season, but throughout each day. I want to intentionally follow Your Light and seek You with my whole heart.

Tot Time: Discuss how there could've been more than three wise men (unlike what we see in modern nativity scenes). The wise men desired to *worship* (which means to "ascribe worth to something") the King. Ask the tots, "What are ways we can worship God?"

Week 3: Sunday, December 17

Read: Matthew 2:1—6

¹After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶ *“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.”*

Reflect: King Herod wasn’t fond of the idea of a competing king—particularly a Jew. Furthermore, when he asked about where He was born, the chief priests and teachers of the law quoted the prophecy from Micah—yet those priests and teachers didn’t choose to go and worship. When we hear the Word, may our hearts be obedient!

Respond: Father, You have arranged my life down to the nanosecond and you’ve surrounded me with promises throughout Your Word to bring me encouragement and comfort. Help me to meditate on those truths so that when You call me to act, I am obedient.

Tot Time: Read Matthew 2:6 again. It says that Jesus will be a shepherd to people. Ask the children, “What is a shepherd? How does God shepherd your own life?”

Monday, December 18

Read: Matthew 2:7—8

⁷ *Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”*

Reflect: Herod had a scheme to thwart the King of the Jews and thought he was being pretty sly by saying he wanted to go and worship Him. Psalm 94:11 says, “The Lord knows all human plans, He knows that they are futile.” Even when our heart plans *good*, we need to recognize that our “brilliant” ways are fruitless in God’s eyes. Instead, let’s commit our ways to the Lord and trust in Him (Psalm 37:5).

Respond: Wise King, no matter how smart I think I am, help me realize it is worthless unless it is from You. Your plan is best, and I don’t want to just ask you to bless the plan I have devised in my own heart. I realize my heart is deceitfully wicked (Jeremiah 17:9) and I desperately need your wisdom and direction.

Tot Time: Ask your children these questions: Do you think King Herod really wanted to worship Jesus? Why would he want to hurt Jesus? Talk about jealousy and how this can keep us from true happiness.

Tuesday, December 19

Read: Matthew 2:9—11

⁹ *After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ 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, frankincense and myrrh.*

Reflect: Unlike our traditional stable scenes we see at Christmas, the magi appeared later after Mary and Joseph had moved from their temporary dwelling place (see Luke 2:7) “to the house.” We

understand from this passage that they couldn't see the star at all times, but as they got closer, the star stopped over where Jesus and His family were located. **Friends, sometimes we can't see God directing our lives, but it doesn't mean He's failed to guide us.** When you're on a long journey, trust that He will show you when to stop—and rejoice in His faithfulness to direct you.

Respond: Father, when “north” is difficult to find in my life, please show Yourself so I can see where You want me to go. Help me to trust in Your path and be overjoyed.

Tot Time: Here are some ideas of what you can discuss with the tots: “The magi traveled an extremely long way to see Jesus. What’s the furthest you’ve traveled to go see someone?” There were no trains, planes, or cars, so when they had finally arrived, it says they were overjoyed because they had waited so long. Talk with the children about what *overjoyed* means and why it was so special to the magi to meet Jesus.

Wednesday, December 20

Read: Matthew 2:11—12

¹¹ 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, frankincense and myrrh.¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Reflect: The magi brought a sacrifice to the child, Jesus. Gold represents Christ’s divinity; frankincense aligns with His priestly role; myrrh speaks of His death and embalming. When worshipping the Lord, consider meditating on His deity, His righteousness, and the death sentence He paid for you.

Respond: God, in Hebrews 13:15, it says for us to continually bring the *sacrifice* of praise through Jesus. Help the fruit of my lips to openly profess Your name. I want you to receive the treasures of my heart.

Tot Time: Explain to the children that one of the reasons we give gifts at Christmas is because that is what the magi did for Jesus. It is better for us to *give* a gift, than it is for us to *get* a gift. Ask them, “What gifts can you make or give to others this year?”

Thursday, December 21

Read: Matthew 2:13—14

¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt,¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Reflect: God is well ahead of man’s plan. God had already provided money for the trip from the gifts of the magi, and He warned Joseph early enough to flee from Herod’s wrath. Herod wanted to protect his reign, and he went to horrific lengths to do so (by killing boys under the age of two). Trust that when

God calls you out of situations, stretches you beyond your perimeter of comfort, or puts you in above your head—He will provide.

Respond: Lord, no life goes unseen by You. Thank You for holding me in the palm of Your hand and walking with me through this road of life. It has many bumps and unexpected twists, but I trust that You go *before* me and You have all the provisions in place.

Tot Time: Here's a possible discussion starter with your kids: Herod wanted to protect his power and what was "his." What special toys or things do you have that you protect or don't want others to touch? What does God teach us regarding those things?

In these final days as we approach Christmas, we'll look to a few pivotal verses that speak to the character of Christ Jesus, the wickedness of mankind, Christ's righteousness, and the merciful gift of His grace!

Friday, December 22

Read: Isaiah 9:6—7

*⁶For 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**.⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.*

Reflect: In Isaiah, we're reminded that not only was there humanity ("a child is born"), but also there was deity ("a son is given"—meaning, the Son of the Most High). He is our "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace." He is wise in counsel, strong in His ruling, forever established, and the one Who brings true peace. Sounds like someone worthy of trust, doesn't it?

Respond: Wonderful Counselor, Your names are many and Your kingdom is eternal. Thank You for walking alongside me throughout each day and reminding me that this broken world is not my home. I am a citizen of another Kingdom (Philippians 3:20).

Tot Time: One of Jesus' characteristics is "Mighty God." Jesus is God, and He is strong. Ask the children what they think "Mighty God" means (hint: it speaks of His power and strength).

Saturday, December 23

Read: Titus 3:3—7

*³At one time we too were **foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved** by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴**But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared**, ⁵he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

Reflect: So often, religions try to tack on extra to-dos we must accomplish or achieve in order to be “good” and receive Christ’s acceptance. But Titus 3 reminds us that we’re all “foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved.” There is no righteousness in us, but God—in His kindness and love—sent Jesus. Don’t undermine grace—there’s nothing you can add to it so you’re found worthy of salvation. Simply accept it as a free gift and let God be magnified.

Respond: Loving Father, it says in 1 John 4:8 that You are love. This is difficult for my feeble mind to comprehend. Therefore, I choose to stand in awe of the unknown and ask for You to continue to expand my understanding of the width, height, and depth of Your love (Ephesians 3:18).

Tot Time: God is *kind* and He is *love*. Ask your tots, “What these two words mean? How can we show kindness and love to others?”

Christmas Eve: Sunday, December 24

Read: 1 Timothy 1:15—17

¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.**¹⁶ But for that very reason I was **shown mercy** so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.¹⁷ **Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

Reflect: What beautiful verses to lead us into Christmas Day. Christ Jesus came into the world to save *you*. He has shown mercy to you, and He displayed His immense patience that you may receive eternal life. May your soul be quiet before Him tonight—and each night—in honor of the love He unceasingly pours upon you.

Respond: Father, words are insufficient to express the gratitude I have for my Savior. You pursued me and have captured me eternally. Thank You for that sweet baby, who was born in humility and lowliness. You are “King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God.” To You “be honor and glory for ever and ever.”

Tot Time: Talk through the events that will happen on Christmas Day, and plan now how you intend to honor Christ despite the hustle and activities that December 25th can bear. Ask the kiddos what special time they can create to honor Jesus on His birthday.

Merry CHRISTmas!

Many blessings to you and yours this holiday season. I pray this Advent was a savored time and you grew in His truth. If you’d like to receive a *weekly* verse-by-verse study via email, sign-up at www.divinelyinterrupted.com and also follow on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/divinelyinterrupted) (www.facebook.com/divinelyinterrupted) or [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/divinelyinterrupted) (www.instagram.com/divinelyinterrupted) for “nuggets” of wisdom and hope throughout the week.

Beginning in January, we’ll start **Philippians**, which carries the theme of “rejoice.” What a wonderful way to start out 2018! **In Him, --T