



# O' Holy Night

ADVENT  
SERIES

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# Advent is Here, but Who Cares?

## WHAT ADVENT IS, AND WHY IT MATTERS TO YOUR SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

It's a strange word, isn't it? *Advent*. What in the world does that even mean? And why are we spending an entire month talking about it? Advent seems like a word that doesn't really belong in the English language, and that's because it doesn't. Advent stems from the Latin word *Adventus*, meaning "arrival." Simply stated, Advent is a season observed in many Christian churches as a time of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ at Christmas. It's a time to reflect on the goodness of God who sent His Son to a dark and weary world. It's a time to consider what the arrival of Jesus Christ means, not only for the people in the 1st century but for us today, as well. But, why does Advent matter?

Think about it: the holiday season is *busy*. Schedules change. There is extra shopping to do. You sometimes have commitments with extended family (which is a very touchy subject for some folks). Relatives often come in from out of town or you end up planning on going out of town to visit family elsewhere. Traffic becomes more of a problem. Stores are overpacked with frantic shoppers. Restaurants have waiting lists that are 30-45 minutes long on weeknights. But hey, at least we get holiday drinks from Starbucks, *right?*

As exciting and stressful as the holidays can be, we are at high risk and often don't even realize it. We are at risk because our attention is suddenly taken by a myriad of details and if we aren't careful, we forget what all the chaos is about. It's the old, tried and true Sunday school answer: Jesus. As we traverse the month of December, we will be embarking on a study on how Advent meets us where we are. This packet will serve as both your curriculum in bible study (if you choose to go to one) and also a space for notes during the sermon each week. We've also included some devotionals written by some of our members here at City on a Hill, as well as lyrics to a Christmas carol that highlights each week's theme. I encourage you to do the devotionals and the Bible study portion even if you don't attend a Bible study.

My prayer is that this study becomes a place of refuge in your mind when things get a little too chaotic. When you are unsure how family gatherings will go this year, *remember hope*. When you are stuck in traffic and stressed out, *remember peace*. When you are anxious about all of the things you need to get done before Christmas morning arrives, *remember joy*. And when you are gathered with individuals you love, sharing gifts with one another, *remember the love* that God demonstrated to us when He gave us the gift of Jesus.

Immanuel came, *and He is still here.*



**SESSION OBJECTIVE: MATTHEW 1:18-25; ISAIAH 7:14**

To understand how Jesus' fulfillment of Isaiah 7 means true hope for God's people.

## Our Hopes and Fears

Every year around Christmas, I always look forward to our church's Christmas Eve service. We've done a lot of different things throughout the years for that service, whether it be a Christmas concert, a Christmas play, or a mix of some other creative elements, but one thing always remained the same no matter - our founding pastor leads us in Christmas carols while everyone lights a candle and sings. It's beautiful both to listen to and to see. It is a tradition at this church that has been held for longer than I've been a member and one I hope to hold on to for as long as I'm here. One of the songs we sing every year is *O Little Town of Bethlehem*. Written in 1868 by Phillips Brooks, an Episcopal priest and then rector of the Church of the Holy Trinity in Philadelphia, the song was inspired by Brook's visit to the Holy Land in 1865, where he attended a midnight service in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve. The serene and profound experience of being in Bethlehem and witnessing the starlit sky and the humble town deeply moved him, eventually leading him to pen the famous lyrics.

One of my favorite lines of the carol comes in both the first and last sections of the song: "Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light. The *hopes and fears* of all the years are met in thee tonight." Christmas is a time of hope, to be sure, but what about fear? Why does he say *both* the hopes *and* fears of all the years come together in the birth of the Savior? It's because Jesus' arrival means the end of both. All of my hopes and dreams diminish as the plan and purpose of God through Christ comes to fruition, and all of my fears for the unknown dissipate as I learn to trust my sovereign Lord who has now been "found in human form" (Phil. 2:8). The birth of Jesus signifies that God is truly with us in a way we never thought possible.

## An Unusual Conception

*The Gospel According to Matthew's* first major narrative begins in verse 18 with the birth of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> Verse 18 indicates something highly unusual has happened: “When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.” The idea of betrothal has often been compared to modern-day engagement, but this is not a good comparison. The term *μνηστεύω* (*mnēsteuō*) conveys a legally binding contract that was signed by witnesses and could only be broken by writ of divorce. The marriage was not consummated until the wedding night, but it was considered a legally binding marriage that, if the husband died, rendered the wife a “widow.” This detail of betrothal is given by Matthew to help explain the controversy of the situation. Since the wedding had not yet been consummated, the only plausible explanation for Mary becoming pregnant was that she had been unfaithful, which is why Joseph, “being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly” (Matt. 1:19). Joseph, though obviously upset by this perceived infidelity, still demonstrated remarkable character by not allowing Mary to be publicly shamed. It is into this context that Joseph is visited by an angel. We are not told which angel, but if we assume that Gabriel is the principal agent in this birth narrative per Luke’s account, it is not unreasonable to assume this is probably Gabriel here as well. The angel proceeds to explain to Joseph the extraordinarily unique circumstances that Joseph and Mary now find themselves in, and even connects their expectant child with a much older text. Below is a breakdown of the key words, ideas, and themes.

### **A SAVIOR WILL BE BORN**

While Joseph considered divorce, the angel appeared to him and said: “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:20b-21). The thrust of this prophetic warning from the angel is that this child, mysteriously conceived by the power of God through the Holy Spirit, will be a Savior to His people. This pronouncement accomplished two things. For one, it acquitted Mary of adultery. The angel confirmed that this conception was not by normal means, and thus Mary had remained faithful to Joseph. But secondly, it determined what the name of their child should be: “Jesus.” This Jesus would bring hope to God’s people because He would be their redeemer.

### **CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Further clarity is given to what kind of a Savior Jesus will be in verses 22 and 23. It’s not uncommon for the New Testament to quote the Old Testament. It’s also not uncommon for the New Testament to make the claim that whatever is being described is a fulfillment of something that was written in the Old Testament. Both of these things are true for verses 22 and 23. Verse 22 says, “Now, all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet,” and then verse 23 then gives a literal quote from Isaiah 7:14. Essentially, Matthew is saying that the birth of Jesus took place in a way that fulfilled something that Isaiah said would happen. This is called a *fulfillment text*. It seems simple enough, right? Whatever happens in the New Testament is the fulfillment of whatever is being quoted from the Old Testament. While this is true, it’s often oversimplified. This is where the methodology of “typology” becomes helpful.

Typology suggests that *there are persons and events in the Old Testament that serve as patterns or types of something more definite in the New Testament*. You could say it this way: the Old Testament person or event is the shadow and the New Testament person or event is the substance. Typology is often called the, “near view/far view” phenomenon, because in it we see both the immediate (or literal) fulfillment of a prophecy, and

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 1:1-17 provides an introduction to the identity of Jesus as “the son of David, the son of Abraham,” with a genealogical trace to prove it.

also a much later typological fulfillment of the same prophecy. With that said, Matthew 1:23 is not a literal fulfillment of 7:14, but a typological fulfillment.

### **CONNECT THE DOTS**

In Isaiah chapter 7, Isaiah speaks to king Ahaz on God's behalf concerning Rezin and Pekah, the respective kings of Syria and Ephraim (also known as Israel). In the context of this passage, Rezin and Pekah have formed a military alliance through which they plan to destroy Ahaz. God, in His kindness, instructs Ahaz to ask for a sign that that will encourage him to trust God in the midst of what appears to be impending war. Instead of trusting God, however, Ahaz foolishly and arrogantly refuses. God decides to give a sign anyway, and Isaiah says to Ahaz, speaking on God's behalf: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and you shall call his name Immanuel" (Is 7:14). This is the verse that Matthew says is being fulfilled, but there are problems that arise if what Matthew means is a literal fulfillment.

For one, according to the prophecy, this will be fulfilled during the lifetime of Ahaz. Isaiah describes a child named Immanuel who will not "know how to refuse the evil and choose the good" before both Syria and Ephraim are deserted (7:16), a claim that cannot be made about Jesus, since Ephraim and Syria will be deserted hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus. So that raises a question: If Jesus is the typological fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14, who is the literal fulfillment? An acceptable answer would be Isaiah's son, born in the next chapter, named Maher-Shalel-Hash-Baz (Is. 8:3-4). Isaiah 8:18 talks about this child as "a sign and portent in Israel from the LORD of hosts." In other words, when God told Ahaz that a child would be born of a virgin who would be a sign to God's people of God's presence with them, that child was born not even two years later. This child was a reminder to the people of Judah that God would not allow Syria or Ephraim to overtake them. He was present. God was with them. In the context of Isaiah 7, then, *Immanuel is a guarantee that God's presence will overcome the enemy that threatens to destroy them.*

But wait a minute, if Isaiah's son literally fulfills the Immanuel prophecy, does that mean he was also born of a virgin? Yes, but not in the way you might imagine. In Isaiah 7, the word, "almāh" is translated "virgin," but it actually means, "a girl of marriageable age or young woman." It, notably, does *not* mean a literal virgin. However, Matthew uses the word παρθένος (parthenos), a word that does mean *an actual virgin*, and this is intentional. Matthew is pointing to a typological fulfillment of this passage that will be found not in Isaiah's son, but in the Son of God. To clarify, consider the breakdown below of how Isaiah 7:14 is fulfilled both literally and typologically.

**The Literal Fulfillment:** A young woman of marriageable age (Isaiah's wife) gives birth to a boy (Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz) who will be called Immanuel because he will signify God's presence.

**The Typological Fulfillment:** An actual virgin (Mary) will give birth to a boy (Jesus) who will be called Immanuel because He is the embodiment of God's presence.

Both Immanuel figures convey hope to the people of God, but Jesus is the final and greatest hope. He is not simply a sign of God's presence, but the very presence of God bound in human flesh. In Him the hopes and fears of the world collide with God's grace and providence. The arrival of Jesus, first hinted at in Isaiah 7, marks the beginning of a new era defined by hope, peace, joy, and love.

## What About Now?

One major takeaway is the fact that Jesus' arrival was foreshadowed in Isaiah 7:14. While that passage was literally fulfilled in Isaiah 8, there is an even greater fulfillment of it in the birth of Jesus. Another takeaway is that Christ is our Immanuel. He is "God with us." Sometimes, it's easy to feel distant from God as a believer, but in Christ you have Christ with you always, to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). Finally, the birth of Jesus is a story of hope finally realized. God, in this moment, set in motion all that would be necessary to provide redemption for His people once and for all.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Matthew 1:18-21. In your own words, write down the events described here. Who all is involved in this story? Write the characters down and what they are doing in this passage. Note anything that stands out as unusual to you.

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2. Put yourself in either Mary's or Joseph's shoes, and write a few sentences down about how you would handle these events if you were them. What do you suppose Joseph was feeling after Mary told him she was pregnant? What do you suppose he was feeling after the angel spoke to him? What kind of stress do you think Mary felt, knowing she would have to talk to Joseph about what was happening?

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### Day Two

1. Read Isaiah 7:10-20. Summarize the events described in this passage. Note any names or places you aren't familiar with.

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2. Read Isaiah 8:1-4, 16-18. How does this fulfill the prophecy in chapter 7? Who is the Immanuel figure in Isaiah 8? What keywords suggest this (hint: verse 18)?

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### Day Three

1. Read Matthew 1:22. What does the "all this" refer to? Which prophet is being referenced here?

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2. Read Matthew 1:23 and Isaiah 7:14. Are there any differences between Isaiah 7:14 and the quotation of it in Matthew 1:23? Write them down.

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### Day Four

1. How does the birth of Jesus convey hope to you, personally?

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2. How does the birth of Jesus impact your fears?

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## Week 1 Discussion: Hope

Hope is a central message of the Scriptures and a fundamental aspect of the Advent season. As a group, talk about the role hope (or hopelessness) plays in your life, and how it affects your everyday choices and relationships.

1. Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word *hope*.
2. Do you consider yourself more hopeful or hopeless? Why?
3. Do you ever struggle with feelings of hopelessness? What do you think the root of those feelings is?
4. Read Titus 2:13. What is the “blessed hope” in this passage? Does this refer to the 1st advent of Christ, or the 2nd coming advent of Christ?
5. Read Colossians 1:27. What is the hope of glory?
6. Read 1 Peter 1:3. What is the “living hope” to which Peter refers?

## Takeaways:

1. Joseph is visited by an angel and told that Mary conceived through the Holy Spirit, and to name their son Jesus because He will save the people from their sins.
2. The arrival of Jesus is foreshadowed in Isaiah 7:14.



# Devotional 1: Hope

**CHRIS CUNNINGTON**

So often we use the word hope to describe something we desire to happen in the future. “I really hope to get that pay increase this year,” or, “I hope that package arrives in time,” or, “I sure hope the cowboys make it to the playoffs.” But in all of these instances, our hope is highlighting an uncertainty (especially with regard to the Dallas Cowboys’ success). These are things we want to see happen but are not genuinely convinced will happen. There is no guarantee.

Biblical hope is different. Biblical hope is being certain that the promises of God will come to pass. So knowing God’s word is critical to hope because it is His revealed truth that we are clinging to, believing that it will happen even if we do not know when it will happen.

But there is another secret revealed in scripture that gives us insight into how our hope can grow: perseverance. Perseverance means clinging to His promises when the things around us are crashing down on us. When we feel powerless, we must not mistake that for hopelessness. It is in those moments that hope comes through belief in God’s word with a side of grit and determination. Romans 15:4 says, “for whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” We read similarly in Hebrews 10:3: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”

Jesus came into this world so that we might have hope – and in the hardest of times – we must choose to endure, stand firm in it, and cling on to it with patience, trusting Jesus and His timing.

Question: Do find yourself focusing more on things you hope will happen, or on the hope of God’s promises coming to fruition?



# O Little Town of Bethlehem

CHRISTMAS CAROL

O little town of Bethlehem  
How still we see thee lie  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
The everlasting light  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in thee tonight

For Christ is born of Mary  
And gathered all above  
While mortals sleep, the angels keep  
Their watch of wondering love

O morning stars together  
Proclaim thy holy birth  
And praises sing to God the King  
And peace to men on earth

O little town of Bethlehem  
How still we see thee lie  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
The everlasting light  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in thee tonight

SCAN THIS QR CODE TO LISTEN  
TO OUR CHRISTMAS PLAYLIST  
ON SPOTIFY





# Devotional 2: Hope

**BOB GRAHAM**

Have you ever been to the beautiful ocean coast, waded into the surf, and felt the undertow pulling down your feet? And then suddenly a huge wave comes over you and you are fighting for the surface to get air? What kept you from going under was your coast guard approved life preserver, designed to keep you afloat.

Yet, in this amazing world we live in, if we are not careful, we can get caught up with things that were never designed to keep us afloat; things that give us a false sense of security and hope, and actually will sink us if we are not careful. But through God's divine providence, He leads us to the true sense of hope, biblical hope, where there is an indication with certainty that if we have our hope centered on the correct object, Jesus, He will never disappoint or let us go under.

Sometimes, God in His great love for us, allows us to go through the crucible of life that will test our faith and hope to burn off the impurities and loosen our grip on things that we thought would bring us hope, security, and comfort, but actually failed us. But through this testing we are left with a purified hope, forged and strengthened from this fiery test, because it is the true hope that we come out of this circumstance with, that has held us together – hope in Christ.

I am reminded of an inspiring story of hope, from a person that went through this test - from failure to greatness. The person was Simon Peter, one of the 12 Apostles, who experienced a failure in his life that brought shame and humiliation, where he denied Jesus 3 times before the cock crowed, just like Jesus predicted. Yet, Peter persevered and overcame this failure, coming out of it with renewed hope in His Christ, where it is made evident in his inspirational writing given to him by the Holy Spirit in 1 Peter 1:3-5. In this passage, he paints a beautiful portrait of the living hope we have set before us as believers in this life and the life to come of what heaven will be like for us: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." As you read these verses, you can just sense the great certainty in Christ that the Apostle Peter feels as he pens these verses to the page. We, too, are guaranteed this living hope as we put our faith in Him each day. We must be careful where we put our hope. Hope is only as strong as the object we put it in. Be certain to place your hope in the strongest, unfailing object there is: Christ Jesus, our Lord.



**SESSION OBJECTIVE: MATTHEW 1:1; 2 SAMUEL 7:12-16; ISAIAH 9:2-7**

To understand how Jesus is the Davidic ruler about whom Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 9.

## Luther's Cradle Song?

In 1996, the Gallup Poll ranked *Away in a Manger* joint second in the most popular Christmas carols of all time. It's a popular song, indeed, but with a strange historical background. For a long time in the early-twentieth century it was thought to have been written by the German reformer, Martin Luther. Many have even referred to it as "Luther's Cradle Song," or "Luther's Cradle Hymn," allegedly written for his son Hans (Johannes). However, more recent historical inquiry has yielded a different story. There are no texts in Luther's known writings that correspond to this carol. There is no German text for this carol that has been found prior to 1904, more than 50 years after the first English publication. Beyond that, the German text reads rather clumsily, indicating it was likely a translation of the English, and not the other way around. The narrative style of the song is not consistent with Luther. Further, while some earlier 19th-century sources mention a carol written by Luther for his son Hans, they are referring to "Von Himmel hoch, da komm icke her." Likely, the carol originated in the mid-19th century as an entirely American Christmas carol. It was first published in 1882, and put to music by both William J. Kirkpatrick and James Ramsey Murray.

The song is a beautiful imagining of the night when Jesus was born, and the peace that fell upon the world both figuratively and literally. The arrival of the Davidic ruler meant peace for God's people, but the scene described in the song also pictures the blissful sleep of the newborn Savior of the world: "The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes. But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes." Every new parent knows the peace that comes from their newborn baby being awake and *not* crying. Peace is a primary theme of Advent because, if for no other reason, it means the arrival of the *Prince of Peace* (Is. 9:6).

## A Davidic Ruler is Born

Matthew begins his entire Gospel account by ascribing to Jesus a title that refers to the significance of His descendancy: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1).

Following this title are several verses that trace Jesus' actual genealogy all the way back to David, and then Abraham, proving that the title Matthew has given Him is accurate. But what does this mean? Each referent speaks to a unique aspect of Jesus' identity.

#### **THE SON OF ABRAHAM**

As the "son of Abraham," Jesus functions as a representative for the people of God. Abraham is the great patriarch of the Jewish people, and the one with whom God established the so-called Abrahamic covenant, "an everlasting covenant" (Gen. 17:3). This is a covenant that would provide blessing to all of the peoples of the earth (Gen. 12:3; 15:5; 18:18). Christ, as the "son of Abraham," is both a genuinely Jewish person who can trace His lineage all the way back to Abraham, but also the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in that all peoples, Jew and Gentile, will find redemptive hope in Christ.

#### **THE SON OF DAVID**

The "son of David" is a messianic title. God promised to send a messianic ruler who would one day sit on the throne of David as a descendant of David and "establish the throne of His kingdom forever" (2 Sam. 7:13). This Davidic figure will have a father/son relationship with God Himself (2 Sam. 7:14). Jesus, as the "son of David," fulfills this promise. It is in this title of Davidic ruler that many other prophecies are given concerning Christ, one of such comes from Isaiah 9.

## **Unto Us a Child is Born**

In Isaiah chapter 8, the prophet Isaiah speaks of a time of "distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish" that will befall the people of God (Is. 8:22). The gloom, however, will not be final: "But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish" (Is. 9:1). In chapter 9, Isaiah prophesies about a time when "the people who walked in darkness" will see "a great light" and "joy" will be "increased" throughout the nation (Is. 9:2-3). This light and joy will be ushered in at the birth of a child (Is. 9:6). Below is a breakdown of the many reasons why this child will be significant.

#### **WONDERFUL COUNSELOR**

The first descriptor given to this child is that he will be a "wonderful counselor." This combines the idea of doing things that are wonderful or miraculous with the ability to give wisdom or counsel. Since God is seen as the sole source of miracles in the Bible and since God is the ultimate source of wisdom, this child will be a vessel through which God's miraculous power and wisdom will be seen.

#### **MIGHTY GOD**

By itself, this name does not necessarily mean that this child will be a divine figure since many other names in the Old Testament include the word for God ("El") in them. However, the later usage of this same phrase in Isaiah 10:21 to describe God makes it clear that this child will be unlike anyone who has ever lived, and likely is divine.

#### **EVERLASTING FATHER**

It is tempting on this side of the resurrection to conflate this title with the first person of the Godhead, the Heavenly Father, but that is not correct. For one, this is a prophecy about the second person of the Godhead, the Son, not the Father. But more than that, the term "Father" was a relatively rare way of describing God in the Old Testament. The term "father" would have been a fitting way of describing heads of tribes who wisely lead their people. In this way, this could be a kingly term. This makes sense given that it is paired with the term "everlasting," a word that is never applied to anyone human in the Old Testament other than God, with

one exception: The promised Davidic ruler in 2 Samuel 7:16 whose throne will be established “forever.” With that in mind, the “Everlasting Father” likely refers to the Davidic king, promised by God, who will rule forever over as a son of God. This argument is further strengthened by the next verse, Isaiah 9:7, which speaks of this son ruling “on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.”

### **PRINCE OF PEACE**

Peace implies the end of war, famine, and the beginning of prosperity for all of the king’s subjects. This is also comparable to the promise of the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7:13-16. David, as an archetype, brings peace to the kingdom of God in Israel. This coming Davidic figure will bring peace to the kingdom of God throughout all of the earth.

## **What About Now?**

Jesus is the child born in Isaiah 9. He is the *Wonderful Counselor* in that He is the incarnate source of miraculous power and wisdom. He is the *Mighty God* in human flesh. He is the *Everlasting Father* in that He will rule of His people as a king for all of eternity. He is the *Prince of Peace* in that He will establish peace between God and men. He is the source of peace for all who believe.

## **Study Questions**

### **Day One**

1. Read Matthew 1:1. What are the two titles given to Jesus by Matthew? Why do they matter?

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2. Read 2 Samuel 7:12. Who is God speaking to in this passage? Who is the one “who shall come from your body?”

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### **Day Two**

1. Read 2 Samuel 7:13-15. What will this coming Davidic ruler do? What is the relationship going to be like between him and God? What will happen to him? What is God’s promise to this figure?

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2. Read 2 Samuel 7:16. How long will his reign last?

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### **Day Three**

1. Read Isaiah 9:1. What is the context of this passage? Why will there be “no more gloom?”

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2. Read Isaiah 9:6. Who, or what, is promised in this verse?

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### Day Four

1. Read Isaiah 9:6. What are the four major titles given to this coming son? What do they each signify?

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2. Read Isaiah 9:7. How does this verse connect this son to the Davidic ruler of 2 Samuel 7 and Matthew 1?

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## Week 2 Discussion: Peace

Peace is another fundamental aspect of the Advent season. As a group, talk about the peace you have found in Christ, and how it shapes the way you handle difficulty and hardship in your life.

1. Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word *peace*.
2. Can you have peace in the midst of hardship? Why or why not?
3. Does peace mean “no conflict?” Why or why not?
4. Read Ephesians 2:14-17. What does the word “peace” mean in the context of this passage?
5. Read Matthew 5:9. What does it mean to be a *peacemaker*?
6. What are some things you need to make peace with in your life? How can this group help you with that?

## Takeaways:

1. Jesus is the “son of David,” the fulfillment of God’s promise to send a Davidic ruler in 2 Samuel 7:12-16.
2. Jesus is the child promised in Isaiah 9 which is another reference to the Davidic ruler in 2 Samuel 7:12-16.



# Devotional 3: Peace

**JACK YOUNG**

When I think of peace and how it relates to the advent of Christ I think of the fact that Jesus was not born into a peaceful world, and yet Luke 2:13-14 clearly states that He came to “bring peace to those on whom His favor rests.” There was an expectation of the Messiah bringing peace.

As a recipient of His favor, I can say without a doubt that Jesus is truly the Prince of Peace promised to us. He knows the reason for the conflict between God and man, between nations, and between people. Knowing the reason for the conflict allows Him to become the agent for peace in several ways:

- He knows the root cause, which is sin, and the penalty for sin, which is death.
- He provides reconciliation through forgiveness and healing which brings people together as they let go of misunderstandings and hurts.
- He shows genuine compassion along with the work of the Holy Spirit through scripture to guide us in our relationships.
- He does not promote peace through violence but rather peace through loving and serving one another as He did.

A relationship with Jesus can be defined by “peace in chaos.” It is one of the ways others see Christ in us and one of the ways we know we are His. In stark contrast to that are the “red flags” of fear, guilt, doubt and shame that define the relationship with our enemy. When we believe we are forgiven, those are replaced by peace, and that changes every relationship we have.

Question: Do you live with peace in chaos? Is Jesus your peace? If so, how so? If not, why not?

# Away in a Manger

CHRISTMAS CAROL

Away in a manger  
No crib for a bed  
The little Lord Jesus  
Lay down His sweet head

The stars in the sky  
Look down where He lay  
The little Lord Jesus  
Asleep on the hay

The cattle are lowing  
The poor baby wakes  
But little Lord Jesus  
No crying He makes

I love Thee, Lord Jesus  
Look down from the sky  
And stay by my side  
'Til morning is nigh

Be near me, Lord Jesus  
I ask Thee to stay  
Close by me forever  
And love me I pray

Bless all the dear children  
In Thy tender care  
And take us to heaven  
To live with Thee there

Take us to heaven  
To live with Thee there

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# Devotional 4: Peace

**BRYAN DUNCAN**

Nearly 800 years before the birth of the Christ, the prophet Isaiah prophesied about God's promised deliverer. In Isaiah 9:6-7, he wrote: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this." The Prince of Peace, Jesus, is coming and yet in Matthew 10:34, Jesus said: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." How can this be the same person? The same God? Is the Bible contradicting itself? Those that haven't walked with Jesus as Lord and Savior have asked these questions for centuries. Even we who do trust Him struggle to reconcile what appears to be polar opposite truths.

Often at this time of year, we sing the Christmas carols *Away in a Manger* and *Silent Night*, and we envision a peaceful winter night in a stable and that gives us some warm fuzzy feelings about the "peace of Christ." And I suppose that's a fine moment to hang on to, but let's not forget about the reality of the circumstances occurring at roughly the same time. King Herod was on a warpath to find the Messiah and destroy any threat to his reign. He would kill the firstborn sons among those in Israel. Joseph was trusting an angel, and under the cover of night they left their home for an undisclosed period of time to hide in Egypt. Fleeing. Children murdered. Families torn apart. This moment was anything but peaceful (Matthew 2:1-18).

There is a quote by King Arthur in the movie *First Knight*: "There's a peace only to be found on the other side of war. If that war should come, I will fight it!" Jesus waged war on sin the moment He was sent by the Father (John 3:16-17). Why? That we might have Jesus, and in Jesus, we might have peace. Peace in Him, and peace for eternity. My peace is not in my circumstances. My peace is not in anything offered in this world. My peace must remain solely in the sovereignty of my Lord, the Prince of Peace, the King of Kings. He is in full control.

It's very important to understand that Jesus is the truth (John 14:6) and that the truth always cuts through deception. So yes, the Prince of Peace did come to bring a sword. More than that, we must come to fully embrace that Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:9). And we can completely trust that the Lord is sovereign; all things are under His control (Lamentations 3:37-39, Colossians 1:16-17, Ephesians 1:11). During this advent season I urge you to shift from attempting to discover peace in your circumstances and begin to rest in the understanding that peace is found in Jesus and His all-sufficient power. He is our true peace.



**SESSION OBJECTIVE: PSALM 98**

To understand how Psalm 98 helps us remember the first advent and anticipate the second advent.

## A Grave Experience

In the summer of 2023, I was given the opportunity to study the theology of the British Reformation for roughly two weeks across the pond. We began in London, England and then spent some time in Edinburgh and Saint Andrews in Scotland before returning to Oxford, England for the duration of our trip. While in England, we visited Bunhill Fields, or more affectionately referred to as “Bone Hill,” a burial ground reserved for English separatists in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. Among the buried are John Bunyan, famed author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, as well as Daniel Defoe, author of *Robinson Crusoe*, Susanna Wesley, mother of John Wesley, and Isaac Watts, the “Father of English Hymnody.” Watts died in 1748, but not before penning several well-known hymns such as *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, and notably, at least for our purposes in this week’s study, *Joy to the World*.

*Joy to the World* was written in 1719 by Watts as a reinterpretation of Psalm 98. The hymn is traditionally sung to the 1848 arrangement of the song put together by Lowell Mason. Since the 20th century, it is the most published Christmas hymn in North America. Interestingly, *Joy to the World* was not written as a Christmas song. It doesn’t mention the virgin birth of Jesus, a common theme through most Christmas carols of that time, and is actually focused not on the first advent of Jesus, but the second advent of Jesus. In fact, stanza four clearly reflects that: “He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glories of His righteousness and wonders of His love.” Either way, today it is a song Christians sing to convey the “good news of great joy that will be for all the people” (Lk. 2:10).

## The Salvation of God Has Come

The Psalms convey a variety of emotion: praise, joy, consternation, fear, worry, anger, dismay; the list could go on. The Psalms reflect the real, lived experiences of David and others who sought to worship the Lord while transparently pouring out their heart to Him. The Psalms are complexly layered. Not Psalm 98. It is entirely praise. Psalm 98 reflects the joy of the people of God who “sing a new song” to Him in response to His

revealed salvation that springs out of His faithfulness to keep His promises (Ps. 98:1). God is a God who never fails and always delivers what He says, no matter what. Below is a breakdown of some of the key themes throughout this Psalm that are important to understanding the heart behind it.

### **SALVATION IS POWERFUL**

Verse 1 indicates that God “has done marvelous things,” and that “His right hand and His holy arm have worked salvation for Him.” In other words, the work of salvation is accomplished through the power of God. It’s important to note that the idea of salvation in the Psalms conveys less of a spiritual saving and more of a physical saving from a present threat. Often the concept of salvation in the Psalms is tied to military relief (Ps. 18:2; 27:1; 33:17; 35:3; 108:12). This is almost certainly the immediate context of this Psalm, as well. However, in a Christological sense, the salvation could also mean an eternal, spiritual salvation guaranteed in Christ. As powerful as God’s saving acts were on the battlefield in the Old Testament, His salvation in conquering sin and death through the resurrected Jesus is far greater.

### **SALVATION IS REVEALED**

Verse 2 dictates that this salvation has not been kept secret; “The LORD has made known His salvation; He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations.” The word “reveal” is a word that means “to uncover;” God’s work of salvation has been uncovered. Similarly, Psalm 67:2 speaks of the “saving power” of God being made known “among all nations.” God’s glory, majesty, and power were seen and felt every time God delivered His people from more powerful foes. It made no sense to the pagan kings why their armies, vast in number and far greater in strength, kept getting mowed down in their assaults on Israel and Judah. Psalm 46:6 reflects this: “The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; He utters his voice, the earth melts.” Psalm 46:9 continues: “He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; He burns the chariots with fire.” The God of Israel was known widely throughout the world because of the destruction He brought upon those who attempted to bring harm to His people. Again, the Christological connection remains; God has made known this salvation to all people through Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11).

### **SALVATION IS BASED ON GOD’S FAITHFULNESS, NOT OURS**

The Psalmist tells us that God’s salvation is built on His love for His people, not only His people’s love for Him. Verse 3 says, “He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel.” This verse is actually echoed in Mary’s Magnificat, signifying a Christological connection (Lk. 1:54). God’s love for His covenant people underlies His commitment to them. This means that everything God does for the benefit of His people is an act of grace, unwarranted and undeserved.

## **Joy to the World**

In response to God’s kindness to us, the Psalm issues the appropriate response: joyful worship and adoration to God: “Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises! Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody! With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD!” (Ps. 98:4-6). Worship is intended to be full of joy, but this is only really possible when the worshipper understands the goodness of God. When we sing “Joy to the World,” we are remembering the reasons for which we are to have joy in the first place. Worship is not a ritual; it’s a response. Verses 7 through 8 begin to reveal the influence on *Joy to the World*: “Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together.” The imagery of all of creation crying out in joy to the arrival of the Messiah is what inspires the lines: “While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and planes repeat the sounding joy!” The last lines in the song, “He rules

the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove the glories of his righteousness,” clearly spring forth from verse 9: “He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity.”

## What About Now?

There are several takeaways from this Psalm, especially in light of the Christmas carol and the present Advent season. For one, worship is not a ritual, but a response. Psalm 98 reflects a grateful heart full of joy that is responding to the goodness of God to powerfully work out salvation and reveal it to the world. God has saved His people based on His love for them, not their love for Him. Worship ought to reflect a profound sense of joy that understands the beauty of grace. Practically speaking, it means when you worship, you ought to be thinking about and reflecting on the things God has done for you personally to shape you more into the image of Jesus. How has God refined you? How are you different today than you were last year? Or five years ago? Those changes ought to inspire a deep sense of gratitude and joy that the Lord has continued to work in your life. If there are no changes or nothing for which you can think about, perhaps you don't have a relationship with God? Sometimes worship is dead in a person's life because they are still spiritually dead. Simply attending church and even a Bible study doesn't make you born again; only belief in the Gospel and the working of the Holy Spirit can accomplish that. Another takeaway is the reality that if Christ came the first time with a message of great joy for His people and dread for His foes, the second coming will be even more joyful for His people, and even more dreadful for His foes. *Joy to the World* is actually a song written with the second coming in mind, and in many ways, Advent is as well. We remember the first appearing of the Messiah, and that should inspire joy, but we also look expectantly to the future second appearing of the Messiah, and that should inspire joy as well. Advent is a joyful reflection on the promises of God to save His people through the Lord Jesus, and joyful anticipation of His return.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Psalm 98:1. What is the command in this verse, and what is the basis for the commandment? What has God done for His people that demands “a new song” to be sung to Him?

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2. Read Psalm 98:2. What has the LORD made known? What did He reveal, and to whom did He reveal it?

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### Day Two

1. Read Psalm 98:3. What has God remembered? Why is this significant?

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2. Read Psalm 98:4. What kind of noise are we to make to God? Why? What should motivate our worship?

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### Day Three

1. Read Psalm 98:5. What instrument is commanded to be used here? What is a modern equivalent?

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2. Read Psalm 98:6. What instruments are commanded to be used here? What kind of sound is to be made?

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### Day Four

1. Read Psalm 98:7. What aspects of creation are to worship God?

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2. Read Psalm 98:8-9. What are the rivers and hills to do in worship? What will Christ do upon His arrival?

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## Week 3 Discussion: Joy

Joy is yet another fundamental aspect of the Advent season. As a group, talk about the joy you have in Christ and how it motivates and inspires you to worship God.

1. Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word *joy*.
2. Can you have joy in the midst of suffering? Why or why not?
3. Do you feel a sense of joy when you worship God in the Sunday morning corporate time of worship?
4. How is joy expressed in worship? What does joyful worship look or sound like?
5. What does a lack of joy indicate?
6. How can you become more joyful?

## Takeaways:

1. Psalm 98 is all about the salvation God has powerfully worked and clearly revealed, and the joyful response His people ought to have in worship.
2. Psalm 98 inspired the well-known Christmas carol *Joy to the World*.
3. Psalm 98 remembers not only the first coming of Jesus, but looks to the second coming as well.



# Devotional 5: Joy

MITCH HENDON

*"And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.'" (Lk. 2:10)*

As we read this text, it should be noted that "I bring you good news" (euangelizomai) is the Greek verbal form of the word "gospel!" This good news/gospel is of great joy! We think about the birth of Jesus Christ and the great joy that came with him. We also think about the joy we receive when we receive the gospel. This great joy, this Christian joy, is a gift that is undeserved, and Jesus tells us that once we come to know this joy, no one can take it from us. (Jn 16:22).

Joy is used a lot in the bible and perhaps it's helpful to remind ourselves of what this Christian joy is that we so undeservingly get to experience. One of my favorite bible teachers, John Piper, described Christian joy as: "a good feeling, in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, by seeing the glory of Jesus Christ, in the word and in his works." Joy is a feeling in the soul, not an emotion. Joy is produced by us believing in the gospel and is insulated from our emotions. Look at the apostles' lives, riddled with physical hardships and trials, and yet marked by unshakable, unremovable joy.

Christmas can be a challenging season for a variety of reasons and as we celebrate this Christmas season, might we bask in the goodness of this good news, this gospel of great joy that we have received! Lastly, don't forget the angel's commission in this passage that Jesus is for all the people! Make it a point to boldly proclaim and share this great joy we have in Jesus!

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your good and perfect word. Thank you for Jesus and thank you for the Holy Spirit. I pray that You would fill me with the joy that only You can provide and that You will use me to illuminate Your good news. In Jesus' Name!

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." (Rom. 15:13)



# Joy to the World

CHRISTMAS CAROL

Joy to the world, the Lord is come  
Let Earth receive her King  
Let every heart prepare Him room  
And Heaven and nature sing  
And Heaven and nature sing  
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing

Joy to the Earth, the Savior reigns  
Let all their songs employ  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains  
Repeat the sounding joy  
Repeat the sounding joy  
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy

He rules the world with truth and grace  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of His righteousness  
And wonders of His love  
And wonders of His love  
And wonders, wonders, of His love

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Joy to the world, the Lord is come  
Let Earth receive her King  
Let every heart prepare Him room  
And Heaven and nature sing  
(And Heaven and nature sing)  
And Heaven and nature sing  
(And Heaven and nature sing)  
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing  
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing





# Devotional 6: Joy

**KELSEY BARKER**

*“And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’” (Lk. 2:10-11)*

As a worship pastor, year after year my Decembers are filled with songs that are centered around themes of the season. From classic carols to commercialized hits to over-dramatized rock epics (looking at you, Trans-Siberian Orchestra), my normal listening changes the moment the Dallas Cowboys complete their annual Thanksgiving Day game. This extends to the sacred songs we sing as a church, and one of those central themes is that of joy. This year at City on a Hill, we will be singing four songs that reference joy or rejoicing, and for good reason! As we read above from Luke’s gospel, the news of the birth of Christ is a great cause of joy. It should be celebrated and remembered.

Unfortunately, it often seems that the joy I celebrate on brisk December Sundays gets stuck inside the songs that extoll it. Instead of feeling joyful during the holiday season, I often feel stressed, exhausted, or downright depressed. How does this happen? The issue stems from self-reliance. For me, I allow the joy of Christ to be overtaken by believing I can generate happiness. Self-generated happiness is counterfeit joy. It is a fleeting echo of momentary success, amusement, or distraction depended on again and again for the placation of my heart. Eventually depending on feeling happy always leaves me feeling hopeless. Being happy is a gift for a moment, not a hope for eternity.

So as a follower of Christ, how do I not depend on happiness, but seek His joy? I believe the key is to remember who provides the joy! In Galatians 5 Paul writes, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” Right there, in verse 22, Paul reminds us that God provides the joy! The Holy Spirit gives us joy, often amid impossible situations. Just as joy was brought to the world through the birth of Jesus, I have to allow the Holy Spirit to provide joy daily. That does not mean that I get what I want, or that things go my way. What I feel like God is teaching me in life is that if I choose to delight in Him, the joy of the Lord will be the strength I need even when I don’t get what I want. His joy is my glad tidings for Christmas and the years to come.



**SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 2:1-7**

To understand how the birth of Jesus Christ took place.

## After War

It was not long after the Napoleonic wars in 1816 that a young, Austrian priest, Josef Mohr, went out for a long walk one night around Oberndorf bei Salzburg, the small city in which he lived. During his walk, he looked out over the quiet, winter-laden town that he loved so much and was inspired at the peace and quiet that had fallen over it. Once enraptured with the sound of guns and cannons, it now sat quietly under the winter sky. Shortly after his walk, he went back to his study and with the birth of the Savior Jesus on his mind, wrote the words to *Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht*, or as we know it: *Silent Night*. Not two full years later, the words put to music by Franz Gruber (not to be confused with Hans Gruber, the villain of the greatest Christmas movie ever made, *Die Hard*), and it became the sensation that it is today.

Silent night conveys so many of the themes of Advent well. There is hope in the birth of the Savior. There is peace in the silence of the night. There is joy in the arrival of the Son of God. But more than anything, Silent Night conveys the love of God to send His light into the darkness of the world. The third stanza reads: "Silent night, holy night. Son of God, love's pure light. Radiant beams from Thy holy face with the dawn of redeeming grace. Jesus Lord, at Thy birth!" Love's pure light was seen the night the Son of God, wrapped in human flesh, came to dwell among us (Jn. 1:14). For God so loved the world that He sent Jesus that day (Jn. 3:16).

## Leading Up to the Silent Night

Verse 1 begins with, "In those days." It's an important reminder that the birth story of Jesus didn't happen "once upon a time" but in a real moment in human history: "when Quirinius was governor of Syria" (Lk. 2:2). Apparently a census was happening which required all people to return to their family home to be registered according to their family name (Lk. 2:3). This required Joseph to return to Bethlehem: "And Joseph also went

up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.” There is a lot in this passage that is important. Joseph’s family descends from the house and lineage of David, which means that his Son will as well. Mary is at this point quite pregnant, and has traveled a slow journey back to Bethlehem where they like any other traveler will stay with their family in their family’s home. This will make for crowded accommodations. This brings up a significant point.

## The Inn?

While they were there, “the time came for her to give birth” (Lk. 2:6). At this point in the story, usually we imagine Joseph frantically trying to find that pesky old inn so that they can have some privacy for Mary to deliver their baby. And usually we imagine that coldhearted innkeeper telling them that there is no vacancy, and in a last ditch effort they find an old, abandoned barn and set up shop there. Sound familiar? None of that is in the Scripture. While there is mention of an “inn” in the text, closer examination of the Greek text helps us understand a clearer picture of what was happening that night.

### **THE ANCIENT HOUSE**

Homes in this time period were often, believe it or not, two-story. The main living space was on the second floor, leaving the first floor open as a stable of sorts for any livestock the homeowner possessed. To avoid bandits or bad weather, the homeowner could bring in his livestock into the bottom floor of the home for protection. The second story had the main living space, as well as a guest room.

### **THE GUEST ROOM**

The word for “guest room” in the Greek language is the word κατάλυμα (kataluma), and it’s translated in most modern Bibles as “inn.” When verse 7 says there was no room in the inn, it more literally means there was no room in the guest room of the house of Joseph’s family. Why? Because all of the family was in town for the census! Mary didn’t have sufficient room to give birth with privacy in the guest room because it was a full house! So, being the savvy problem solvers that they were, they went down to the bottom floor of the home where the livestock were usually kept and she gave birth there, wrapping Jesus in swaddling clothes and putting him in the manger, or feeding trough, as a makeshift cradle. Inns were not commonplace in small, off the beaten path towns like Bethlehem. They were usually only erected in places where a lot of traffic would occur.

### **A REAL INN**

To add force to this argument, consider a later story in Luke’s Gospel in Luke 10. Jesus tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan, where a man is beaten and left for dead in a ditch. Two religious leaders pass him by and avoid coming close to him. It’s the lowly Samaritan that does the right thing. Verse 34 says: “He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.” He takes him to an inn, and even pays an innkeeper for his room for a few days (Lk. 10:35). The word here for “inn,” unlike Luke 2, is the Greek word πανδοχείον (pandocheion), and this word *does* mean a traditional inn.

## The Silent Night

So, let’s put it all together. Joseph and Mary traveled from Galilee to Judea, to the city of David also known as Bethlehem, because a census had been called, and that required them to return to Joseph’s family home to be registered there with the rest of his family. When they arrived, they all stayed in the family home. However, Mary went into labor, and given the crowded nature of the house, the guest room (or the “inn”) was full. As a

result of that, they had to go down to the bottom floor of the family home where livestock were usually kept so that she could give birth with a little more privacy. After giving birth, she used a feeding trough (or a “manger”) as a makeshift crib for baby Jesus. There was no actual inn, or innkeeper. Jesus’ birth does not need to be over exaggerated to be unique or special; His birth is already the most unique and special event in human history regardless of where He was born. The bottom floor of a home is still not an ideal place to give birth, but it’s certainly an upgrade from the way it’s usually depicted. Knowing the details, however, makes the story make more sense.

## What About Now?

One of the biggest takeaways from this passage is the love of God for us. He sent His Son to be born of a virgin, born in an unlikely scenario, and met by strange visitors (Lk. 2:8-20). One of the most history-altering events took place and yet no one knew it was happening when it happened, save a few people. God’s love is big but also unusual. Another takeaway for this passage is how actually this night was likely anything but silent. A pregnant woman went into labor and the house she was in was so full, she had to go down to the bottom level where the animals were kept in order to have some privacy to give birth. I imagine it was actually quite chaotic in that house! Another takeaway for this passage is the importance of getting the small details right. When you correctly understand how the story actually went down, it actually makes the story all the more believable. It seems strange to imagine an innkeeper turning away a pregnant woman in labor. It makes way more sense that the house was full because of the census, which required them to think on their feet a little and move down to the bottom floor. Stories like this only add validity to the Scripture when they are understood correctly.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Luke 2:1. What does “in those days” indicate? What did Caesar Augustus require?

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2. Read Luke 2:2. Who was governor of Syria during this time?

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### Day Two

1. Read Luke 2:3. Who all went to be registered? Where did they have to go to do this?

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2. Read Luke 2:4. Where did Joseph come from? Where did he go to?

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### Day Three

1. Read Luke 2:4. What house and lineage was Joseph from? Why is this significant?

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2. Read Luke 2:5. Who was with him? What was his relationship to her?

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### Day Four

1. Read Luke 2:6. What happened to Mary when she was there in Bethlehem?

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2. Read Luke 2:7. In your own words with the notes above in mind, describe the events in verse 7.

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## Week 4 Discussion: Love

Love is the final and most important aspect of the Advent season. Love is an attribute of God, because “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:16). Love is what motivates God to send His Son to this dark and dying world (Jn. 3:16). As a group, talk about the importance of love to living out your faith.

1. Icebreaker: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word *love*?
2. Can you obey Scripture without love? Why or why not?
3. How is Christian love different from worldly love?
4. What’s the most love you’ve ever felt from someone else? What did they do to express it? Why was it so meaningful?
5. What is your love language?
6. How can you express Godly love to those around you, particularly during the Christmas season?

## Takeaways:

1. Joseph and Mary return to Joseph’s family home in Bethlehem because of a census.
2. While they were there, Mary gave birth to Jesus in the lower level of the home.



# Devotional 7: Love

WALTER STEWART

*"By this the love of God was revealed in us, that God has sent His only Son into the world so that we may live through Him." (1 John 4:9)*

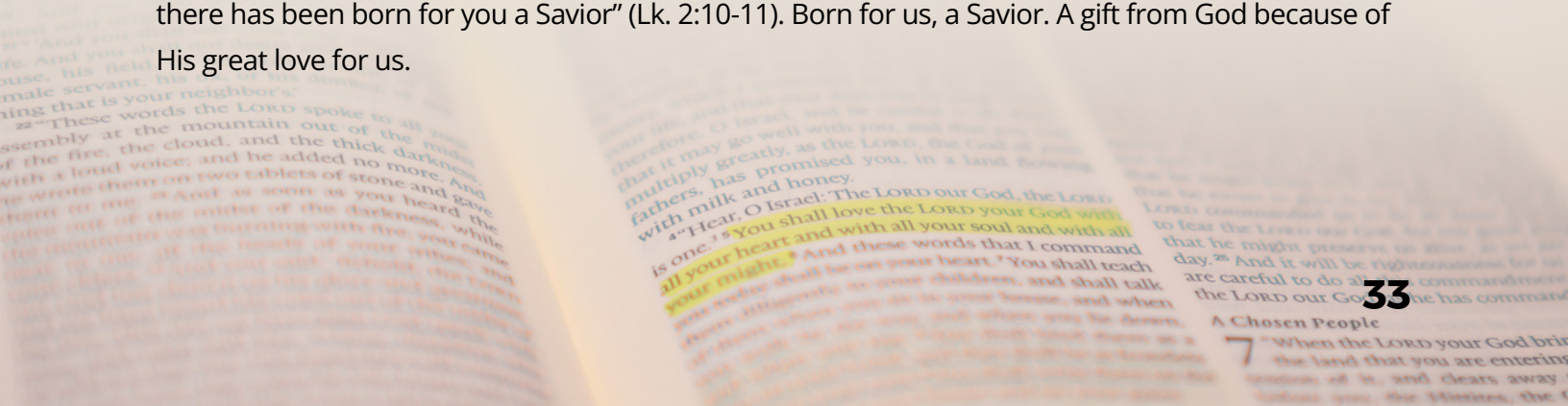
God has a wonderful Son who is literally perfect in every way. The Triune God was together in union before time, and at the beginning of time They created all that exists by the words They spoke. God and His Son and the Spirit are different persons, and yet One God.

Man and woman were the pinnacle of God's creation. He made them in His image, and He loved them. Genesis tells us He planted a beautiful garden as their home and that He would visit the garden where He, the man, and the woman could all talk to each other, a testament of God's love for them. God's only command was to not eat the fruit that grew on one tree in the garden, a test of their love for Him.

They disobeyed God's command, and that sin made them unfit for the presence of God, and only fit for destruction because God must judge sin. However, God had already provided the Way for all men and women to regain a relationship with Him. God gave His perfect Son, Jesus, to be born and to live among us (Jn. 1:14). Jesus faced the same trials and temptations we do, yet He remained perfect (Heb. 4:15). Though sin and death had no claim on Him, He took the penalty for sin and gave His life so those who have faith in Him will not die (Rom. 5:8).

During Advent season, more than any other time of the year, our thoughts are more likely to turn toward hope, joy, peace and love. We see the words decorating homes, churches and businesses. We hear them in conversations and song lyrics. Hopefully we even feel them more passionately.

However, it's important to remember that love existed before hope, joy and peace, not in the heart of man or woman but in the heart of God, as He formed them at creation. During Advent we celebrate God's greatest revelation of His love for us, the arrival of His Son, Jesus. The angel told the Shepherds this was "good news of great joy which will be for all people, for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior" (Lk. 2:10-11). Born for us, a Savior. A gift from God because of His great love for us.



# Silent Night

CHRISTMAS CAROL

Silent night, holy night  
All is calm, all is bright  
Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child  
Holy Infant so tender and mild  
Sleep in heavenly peace  
Sleep in heavenly peace

Silent night, holy night  
Shepherds quake at the sight  
Glories stream from heaven afar  
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia  
Christ the Savior is born  
Christ the Savior is born

Silent night, holy night  
Son of God, love's pure light  
Radiant beams from Thy holy face  
With the dawn of redeeming grace  
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth  
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth

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# Devotional 8: Love

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In Mark 12:28-34, a scribe asks Jesus what the **most important** commandment is. In his response, Jesus says: "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

What a lucky scribe! Not only did he ask a question for which he actually got an answer (Jesus usually replied to question with another question), but he also got the bonus answer of the second most important commandment. This interaction must have puzzled many Jews who were listening. The Torah, also known as the Mosaic Law (which included the 10 commandments) was composed of 613 commandments. And Jesus literally just told them that these two are the most important.

The two commandments Jesus told the scribe can be found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18, but Jesus did more than simply quote these two commandments; he summarized all of the law. When God gave the commandments to Moses, everything pertained to two things: how people should relate to God, A.K.A. love Him, and how people should relate to each other, A.K.A. love each other. In Matthew's account of this same passage, Jesus added that "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:40).

The apostle Paul also said that "faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love." (1 Corinthians 13:13). Advent is the season where we are reminded of these, but let's not forget that "the way of love" should govern our daily life. God's concept of love is all about making decisions that show you really love Him and your neighbor. Sometimes that means asking reflective questions to do a "heart check" every now and then:

- Am I loving God in making daily decisions to take care of my heart?
- Am I loving God in weekly feeding my soul with nourishing spiritual food?
- Am I loving God in choosing what goes into my mind?
- Am I loving God in taking care of my body and my strength?
- Am I loving my neighbor in thinking less of me and more of others?