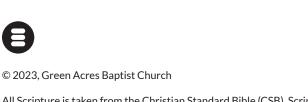


# ADVENT

GOD WITH US



All Scripture is taken from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB). Scripture quotations marked CSB have been taken from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB), Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible and CSB are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

#### gabc.org





# GOD with US

JOIN US SUNDAYS IN DECEMBER 9:30AM & 11AM



# CHURCH FAMILY.

Our dedicated staff has put together this special resource with YOU in mind. Our heartfelt desire is that amidst the holiday rush, we can take a moment to pause and deeply contemplate the incredible work the Lord has accomplished on our behalf. In the grand tapestry of the Bible, every story intricately weaves a thread that leads us to Jesus. From Genesis to Revelation, you can trace the scarlet-colored thread of the gospel connecting them all. This Christmas season, we invite you to journey through these stories with us, reflecting on how they eagerly anticipated the arrival of our King.

We hope this Advent Companion Guide becomes a personal guide for you as we reflect on the coming of the King this Christmas. Hallelujah, for the King has indeed come!

famed Spottie yorsett

Merry Christmas,

Michael and Katie Gossett







## ISAIAH 40:9-11

Zion, herald of good news, go up on a high mountain. Jerusalem, herald of good news, raise your voice loudly. Raise it, do not be afraid! Say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!' See, the Lord God comes with strength, and his power establishes his rule. His wages are with him, and his reward accompanies him. He protects his flock like a shepherd: he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them in the fold of his garment. He gently leads those that are nursing.

## GOD'S POWER & LOVE

Jarod Espy, Worship Pastor

How amazing a thought – that our God, our Creator - the One Who spoke all things into being, Who sits enthroned above all things, Who possesses all power and all authority, has made a plan of salvation to rescue us, His people. Take a moment to ponder that. God is God. He can do whatever He wants. He can rule and reign however He pleases. Now think of how astonishing it is that this same God actually loves us – that is His character. Even more, He loves us so much that He would demonstrate the extent and depth of that love for us by sacrificing His only Son so that we might be saved! Wow! We don't deserve this. What an amazing God we serve! That fact alone should compel us to respond in worship, in adoration, and in gratefulness. We should desire to shout it from the mountaintops so that everyone may hear. That is the spirit of this passage: that such a great and awesome God would gently lead us and save us.

May that be our response as well this very day. When we consider the greatness of our God, and consider the fact that He cares for us so much that He would send His Son Jesus, we should be moved to worship and eagerly share this good news to all those around us.

#### **ADULTS**

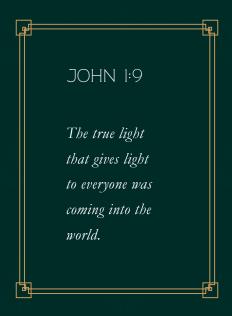
- 1. In all the busyness of life, when was the last time you took time to just be still and set your mind on how awesome and powerful God is? Can you just take a moment to try and fathom His greatness?
- 2. Will you now take a moment to think of His character? When you think about the extent of His love, how does it make you feel?
- 3. Will you take a moment to express your response back to God? (Exgratefulness, adoration)

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. When is the last time you talked to your friends about God's love?
- 2. How have you seen God care for you and your family?

## DAILY PRAYER

Lord, You are great and awesome! You are too big to comprehend. Help me today to view my circumstances in light of how great You are. When I consider the fact that You are a personal and loving God Who cares for me, I can't help but praise You with everything in me, and then share it with those around me. I pray that You would fill me with great joy today because of the good news of the gospel and give me opportunities to share it with those around me. To You be all the glory. In Jesus' Name, Amen.



## TRUE LIGHT

#### Walter Ballou, Minister to Men & Singles

A candle, flashlight and the sun are all similarly known as a light. Even though they seem alike, nothing compares to the purpose and magnitude of the sun! There is no second place or runner-up. The light output of the sun is without equal, matchless. In this passage of scripture, the author is declaring that Jesus, the Messiah, is the True Light. He is brighter than any light source we have, even the sun. He is coming into the world to shine the true light to all people.

John the Baptist makes a clear declaration that he was not the light. He was only a messenger of the Light. His role was to testify and be a witness to the world about Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 5:20, the apostle Paul makes a similar statement about our role as a Christian. He says we are "ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us." We are messengers of the gospel. We are "light carriers" to a world searching and living in spiritual darkness. Ask God to show you how to be an ambassador of the Light during this special Christmas holiday.

#### **ADULTS**

- 1. How can we be a witness for the Light of Jesus to our neighbors, friends and community during this Christmas season?
- 2. Have you embraced the role of ambassador and shared the Good News of Jesus with someone lately?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. What does it mean when we say people are living in darkness versus living in the light?
- 2. What is the purpose of lights in our everyday life? How does that compare to Jesus being the Light of the World?

### DAILY PRAYER

Thank you, God, for sending Jesus, the Light, into the world of darkness to bring hope and eternal life. Show me this Christmas how I can be an ambassador and tell others about your amazing love and grace.



## GOD WITH US

## Jason Humphrey, Associate Missions Pastor

Through the prophet Isaiah, Jesus invades humanity with a God-sized announcement. You could focus on so many things in this promise of the coming Savior. You could look at the power of the immaculate conception. You could hone in on the God who wants to be found by giving seekers a sign. But take special note of the fact that Jesus is given a new name—Immanuel which means "God is with Us".

The name Immanuel encapsulates the essence of the gospel. Through Jesus, God bridged the gap between humanity's brokenness and His divine perfection. Immanuel signifies God's desire to be close to us, to walk with us through life's joys and trials. In Christ, God offers us redemption, forgiveness, and eternal fellowship with our Creator. He invaded a broken world. A world that deserved judgment and rebuke. And what does God provide? He provides Himself.

I would hope, during the chaos of this fractured world, you could settle in your heart that Jesus is God's answer to you and me. Our only response and our ultimate response is to worship the God who is with us. He's not afraid of our brokenness. We are not so messy that the Master doesn't want to commune with us. He comes to us as the God who can and will help us get to right standing with Him.

#### **ADULTS**

- 1. Why is it important that His name would be Immanuel?
- 2. What does the meaning of Immanuel "God with us" truly mean to you?
- 3. How can studying prophecies and their fulfillment deepen our faith and understanding of God's providential work in human history?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. How can the truth of "Immanuel" bring comfort, assurance, and guidance during challenging times?
- 2. What would it look like to live as "God is with you" at your school?

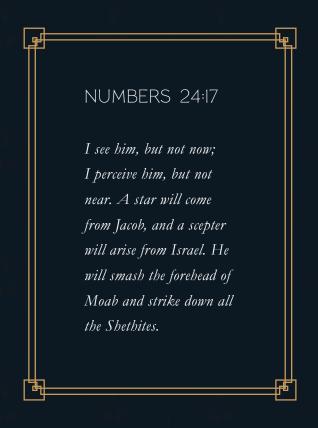
## DAILY PRAYER

Father God, thank you for fulfilling prophecy of the coming Messiah. Thank you for the name Immanuel and its meaning of "God with us".

Let us be reminded that there is hope found only in You. Iesus.







## HIS PRESENCE

Leigh Evans, Preschool Minister

"Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star, How I wonder what you are?" is a line from a favorite childhood song. When we read this passage in Numbers, we do not have to "wonder" which star is referenced! King Balak of Moab has called in the prophet Balaam to bring a curse on God's people, the Israelites. Even though Balaam was a true prophet, he was willing to curse God's people for his own greedy gain, but God gave him words of blessing for Israel instead of curses. Balaam speaks a messianic prophesy when he refers to a star coming out of Jacob and a scepter rising out of Israel, it is Jesus!

The Israelites were right in the middle of their wandering in the wilderness for forty years. They were a complaining and grumpy people. Even with their complaints and groanings, God was still with them and had a plan to give them hope for their future! JESUS! We may feel a little bit like the wandering Israelites during this Christmas season! We are super busy with activities associated with Christmas. We are shopping, planning, attending parties. We are trying to balance responsibilities to families while working, and we can arrive at Christmas day frazzled, grumpy and out of sorts! STOP, just pause and remember the plan God has for our present and our future! He sent His one and only Son to live on earth; to sacrifice himself in death on a cross; and rise to life again so that our sins are covered. We have the opportunity to be restored to oneness with God forever! In Revelation 22:16, Jesus says that He is the bright and morning star. Let the light of Jesus shine on your path to Christmas.

#### **ADULTS**

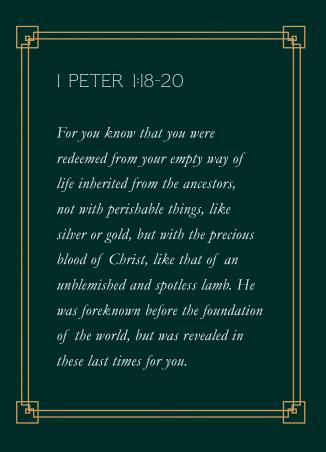
- 1. What things prevent us from being able to put God first during the Christmas season?
- 2. What is one tradition that you have or one tradition that you can implement during the Christmas season that will draw you closer to God's plan?
- 3. Who can you share God's plan with today?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. What animal did God use to speak to the prophet Balaam? (Numbers 22)
- 2. Who was the scripture referring to when it says, "I see him, but not now"?

## DAILY PRAYER

Lord God, thank you for Your great plan to save us. Help us to look to You in all things. Your way and your timing are always best. Praise Your name. Amen



# NO PRESSURE

Jacob Browning, Campus Pastor - Flint

Christmas is truly the most wonderful time of the year! However, there can be a lot of pressure planning Christmas! Perhaps Christmas planning began in October, November, or even earlier. Pressure to have the perfect meal, perfect gifts, perfect tree, perfect lights, perfect manger scene, perfect wreath, perfect... well... I think you get the point. There are many pressures competing for our attention in the hustle and bustle of Christmas. Our pursuit for the perfect Christmas can lead us to missing God's perfect plan of redemption.

Peter discusses this perfect plan of redemption in 1 Peter 1:18-20. Have no shame making plans for your family's Christmas, but these pursuits of perfection are merely human plans. Christmas is the celebration of God's perfect plan to redeem the world by sending His Son, Jesus. This redemption is not like the perfect meal, perfect gifts, perfect tree, perfect lights, perfect manger scene, perfect wreath, perfect... well... again you get the point! The redemption accomplished by Jesus is imperishable, unblemished, and spotless. It is perfect. Even more amazing is that God's perfect plan to bring perfect redemption began before the foundations of the world! Our best plans for a perfect Christmas will never exceed the perfection of God's plan for redemption. Remember God's perfect plan of redemption when our plan for perfection begins to take our peace.

#### **ADULTS**

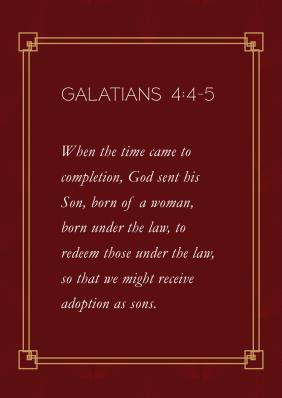
- 1. What is bringing you the most pressure this Christmas?
- 2. How can celebrating God's perfect plan described by Peter relieve that pressure?
- 3. If your plans for a perfect Christmas do not work out, will this hinder your ability to fully celebrate Christmas? Does it diminish God's perfect plan to send His Son?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. What are you most excited about this Christmas?
- 2. If you do not get the perfect gift, is there still a reason to be grateful at Christmas?

## DAILY PRAYER

Father, I am so grateful for your perfect plan to send your Son, Jesus, to redeem the world. No matter how much we plan this Christmas, I pray we do not forget to celebrate your perfect plan to redeem us from our sins.



## **ADOPTION**

## Kyle Cox, Minister of Recreation

God sending His Son was never a surprise. The Christmas season was the plan all along. It is so important this Christmas season to not forget why we celebrate Christmas. We are remembering and celebrating a God who loves us so much He sent His own Son to walk on the same ground His creation walks. Jesus chose to humbly live under the laws of the people He came to save and the people who would betray Him.

Jesus did all of this because He knew in the very beginning that those laws were not enough. A child being adopted into a family is a beautiful thing, but that adoption is only temporary. Jesus has chosen to take full responsibility of our eternity. Jesus has already met judgment and has done everything necessary for you to be adopted into His Kingdom forever. What better time than Christmas for someone in your family or someone you know to hear what Jesus did and say yes! I want to be adopted in this family. Go and share what Jesus did for you and why you celebrate Christmas!

#### **ADULTS**

- What does Paul mean when he writes "born under the law, to redeem those under the law"?
- Have you been adopted into Jesus' family?
- 3. Do you know someone that needs to hear how much Jesus loves them this Christmas?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. What does it mean to be adopted?
- 2. Do you know what it means to be adopted by Jesus?

## DAILY PRAYER

God, I pray for opportunities to share what Jesus did in my life and my adopted eternal family. Open hearts and minds to your gospel and give me the words to say to those that need to hear about Your love.







## A SPECIAL ARRIVAL

Billy Bob Dempsey, Minister of Instrumental Music

My dog Maggie and I can be found sitting on the front porch early in the morning. I take my coffee (and a microwave heating pad). Maggie knows that when I have those two things in hand, it's time to go outside. I hold the door for her and she walks down the porch to my chair. She waits patiently as I place my coffee and phone on the window ledge and place the heating pad in the spot that needs it most that day. When I'm ready, she jumps up in my lap. There, she surveys the neighborhood for cats and other critters. Sometimes she nuzzles in close for me to pet her and rub her head, but mostly, we just sit quietly together. She and I both look forward to it each day. Every other week, our friend Marjorie, who plays French horn in the GABC Orchestra, walks by with her friend between 6:30 and 6:45. On those mornings, when I tell her that Marjorie is coming, she gets excited and gives me an anticipatory lick. She knows Marjorie and she knows she is coming.

When Maggie sees Marjorie walking up the street, I hold her until Marjorie is close enough for me to let her go safely. Maggie runs to her and barks as she comes close to our curb, tail wagging all the while. They say good morning and Maggie gets her love, then she returns to me and Marjorie continues on her walk. Maggie looks forward to seeing Marjorie AND Marjorie looks forward to seeing Maggie.

In Micah 5:2, the prophet tells us where Jesus was to be born, that He would be God's choice of ruler, and that he would be coming from eternity. Maggie looks for Marjorie on those mornings and is excited when she finally gets to see her. Advent is no different. We celebrate, looking for the coming of this eternal ruler sent from God...and we have every reason to be excited about His arrival. His arrival as a baby was just the start. Redemption was His grand plan.

#### **ADULTS**

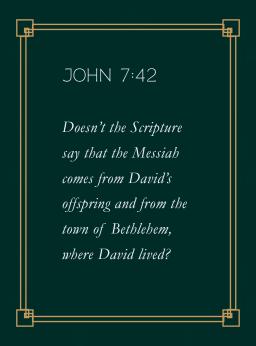
- 1. Are you excited for the coming of this ruler, this year? Imagine what it would be like if He had never come.
- 2. What can you do differently this year to celebrate the coming of Christ with anticipation?
- 3. How do you know that Jesus anticipated coming to YOU?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. A ruler is coming. How are you looking forward to Him?
- 2. A ruler is coming. How do respond to Him?

#### DAILY PRAYER

Lord, thank you for coming to be with us and for being the fulfillment of God's promises. Help us to trust in you and to remember that you hear our prayers. As we celebrate your birth, let us be reminded of your love and presence in our lives. Amen.



# PROMISE Meghan Goad, Girls' Minister

Christmas is such a special time for believers. It's the season on which our faith is built. The idea that a child would be born to set us free. But how would we have known if the scriptures didn't tell us? Having Old Testament truths come to completion in the New Testament helps even the most un-believing person see that what God spoke would one day be fulfilled.

These prophesies lit the path to show us who the Messiah would be and when He would come to us. Today's passage tells us that He would come from the line of David. To think that the Light of the World would come from the lineage of a young, poor shepherd boy. A lineage that wasn't perfect, but through David we saw failure, forgiveness, compassion, and hope. He became the symbol of the redemption that was still to come.

As we celebrate this season with family and friends, we have the hope of seeing His promises being fulfilled even in our own lives. He has brought salvation, redeemed our relationship with God, and has prepared a place for us with Him in eternity. This is the best Christmas gift we could ever receive. As you gather with loved ones this time of year, let's keep in mind the promises yet to come.

#### **ADULTS**

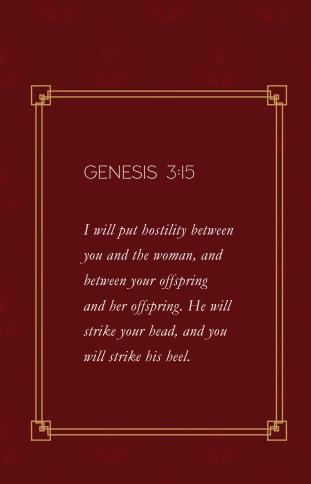
- 1. What situation in your life can you leave in God's hands with hope He will answer in His perfect timing?
- 2. Why do you think it was so important for Jesus to fulfill all the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. David is one of the most memorable and influential people in the Bible. What story is your favorite?
- 2. Sometimes it's hard for us to be patient and wait on God's promises to us. Is there a situation happening at school, with your friends, or in your family that you can put in the Lord's hands?

## DAILY PRAYER

Lord, thank you for redeeming our relationship with You and providing a way for us to spend eternity in Your presence. During this season, help me to focus on the promises You have waiting for me. I trust in You and will give You all the glory. Amen.



# REDEMPTION

## Kelvin Reed, Associate Minister of Worship

Christmas is full of many wonders but the greatest of all can be found in the fact that Jesus was born in that stable in Bethlehem in order to redeem us. Today's verse is often called the pro-evangelium (Good News) because it reveals God's redemptive plan. Isn't it amazing that even in the first book of the Bible we learn of Jesus and the plan to defeat Satan? The Bible contains 929 chapters, and as early as this third chapter we can already see God's amazing plan!

From the very creation of the world and from the fall of Adam and Eve, redemption was always at the center of God's plan. Just like John 3:16, Genesis 3:15 reminds us that Jesus came to defeat Satan and offer us redemption. In the midst of busy Christmas schedules, don't miss the opportunity to praise and worship the Father for what He has done through the gift of the newborn King.

#### **ADULTS**

- In this passage, God is speaking to the serpent (Satan). God says that he
  will put enmity between Satan and the woman (her seed). How do you
  keep yourself separate from Satan so that you can live out God's plan
  daily?
- 2. As the days draw closer to Christmas, what can you do to help remember the redemption plan that God has in place for you? Will you take time throughout the season to thank Him and celebrate this?
- 3. In thinking of God's redemption plan, look at the lyrics of the carol "Joy to the World" and notice the Good news being told in the familiar song.

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

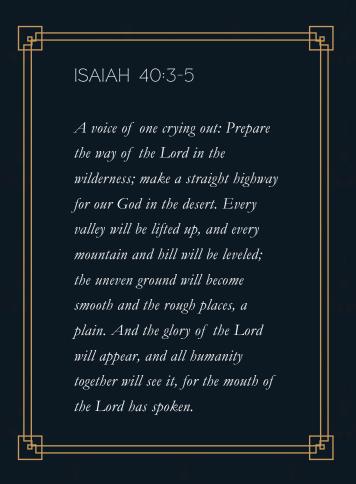
- 1. What does the word 'redemption' mean?
- During this Christmas season, how can you celebrate Jesus and thank Him for what He has done?

## DAILY PRAYER |

Lord, Thank you for your amazing redemption plan that allowed Jesus to rescue us and save us. We praise you and thank you for Your goodness.







# A VOICE

#### Samuel Sadler, Local Missions Director

Have you ever made plans well in advance, maybe for a family vacation, a college reunion, or deciding whose house the family will gather at for the holidays? I'm sure you have, and God is a planner too; only His timeline rarely looks like ours. Just as God liberated the children of Israel from Egypt by bringing them through the wilderness, the prophet Isaiah foresaw a time when God would again deliver the Jews, not just from their current Babylonian exile, but in fallen mankind's ultimate deliverance through the ministry of Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist appeared as "a voice of one crying out" in the wilderness 700 years after Isaiah spoke those words and preached about repentance for the forgiveness of sins. God chose John the Baptist to introduce Jesus Christ to the people of Israel and prepare them to receive their Savior and Redeemer. John humbly acknowledged his supporting role and his inferior position as only 'a voice.' He always kept in mind that someone more powerful than him was coming after him, One whose sandals he was not even worthy to untie (See Mark 1:4-8).

#### **ADULTS**

- 1. Have you heard 'a voice' calling you to repentance? Have you answered?
- 2. In what ways is God looking to use you as He did John to point others to Him? (See 2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. How might God use our family right where we live to tell others about Him?
- 2. What does God's patient planning tell us about the importance of His gospel message to the world? (See John 3:16-20)

### DAILY PRAYER

Father in Heaven, please use my life to prepare the way for Jesus to come with his Good News into the lives of my friends, acquaintances, and family In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

#### ISAIAH II:1-5

Then a shoot will grow from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit.

The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him, a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, a Spirit of counsel and strength, a Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight will be in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, he will not execute justice by what he hears with his ears, but he will judge the poor righteously and execute justice for the oppressed of the land. He will strike the land with a scepter from his mouth, and he will kill the wicked with a command from his lips. Righteousness will be a belt around his waist.

## NEW LIFE

#### Colton Berryhill, Middle School Minister

The winter season is one of my favorites, as it's so close to the holiday of Christmas—which means Christmas music, movies, and family time. Every year, I look forward to this time as it brings peace, joy, and hope to a lost world. For the past few years, one of my favorite traditions has been traveling to Grapevine because of how well they revamp their city for Christmas with the abundance of lights, decorations, hot chocolate, and tourists who are celebrating the most wonderful time of the year. Speaking of "revamp," to me what comes to mind is the word "newness." I love the song called "Go Tell It on the Mountain," my favorite lyric being "Down in a lowly manger, our humble Christ was born, and brought us all salvation, that blessed Christmas morn." This Christmas classic reminds me of new life that all started with the birth of Christ who has come to redeem our souls.

Here in the book of Isaiah, we read of a branch that will have roots and will bear fruit from the stump of Jesse. The branch is Jesus, entering as King and Messiah to a dead world that is in desperate need of a new life. Our Savior brings the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of understanding, the spirit of counsel, the spirit of strength, and the spirit of knowledge. As we continue this Christmas season, always know that the same God of Israel who spoke to His people then is still the same God we worship and believe today. Our hope for the days ahead is what we read at the end of this passage "...Righteousness will be a belt around his hips; faithfulness will be a belt around his waist." Everything Jesus does is touched by His righteousness and faithfulness. Don't let Christmas be about worldly wants and desires; instead, fix your eyes on the Son of Man who stepped down from His throne so that we might be saved.

#### **ADULTS**

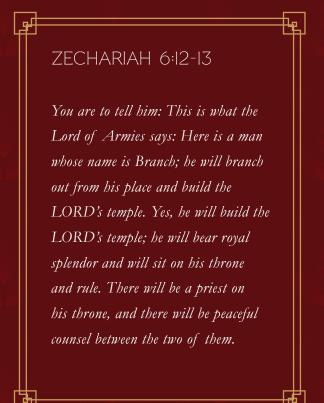
- 1. How does the birth of Christ transform your life?
- 2. Why is it so important for us to understand the righteousness of our Savior?
- 3. How can you start to live in the new life and live out the new name that Christ has written down for you in glory?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. How does the act of faithfulness help grow a family who is following Jesus?
- What are some ways you and your friends, siblings, or neighbors could start today, to show the world that Christ was born and has brought salvation to this earth?

#### → DAILY PRAYER ⊢

Dear Heavenly Father, may I live in the new life that you freely gave me, teach me to live out in spirit and truth, and lead me to be a witness for your Kingdom.



## AN INVITATION OF HOPE

Jaime Cornelius, Interim Director of Graceworks

"A thrill of hope the weary soul rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn."

There are few things that stimulate the brain the way music does. Research has shown that listening to music can reduce anxiety, blood pressure, and pain as well as improve sleep quality, mood, mental alertness, and memory. My all-time favorite Christmas song is "O Holy Night." The lyrics capture my emotions and prepare my heart and mind to focus on the holiness of God and the hope we have in Jesus!

In today's reading, we see that Zechariah invites us to hear a message of hope. Before Christ's first advent, prophets like Zechariah proclaimed God's messages to prepare the Israelites for the coming of the Messiah. The Branch identified in verse 12 is also the root of Jesse mentioned in Isaiah Chapter 11. He was raised to reign over God's people. As we reflect on the Messiah's humble entrance into our world, we are told that He will branch out from His place. Paul tells us in Romans Chapter 1 that Jesus came first for the Jew then the Gentile. The root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations, and in Him the Gentiles will find hope (Romans 15:12). That root has become a branch. Today we are all invited to be grafted into His eternal kingdom.

Zechariah moves from the first advent to the second. Verse 13 prompts us to look forward to a new day when Jesus the Messiah will sit on His throne as King and High Priest in His temple. The old makes way for the new. No more crying, grief, or pain because the former things will have passed away (Revelation 21:4). All will be made new! Can you imagine seeing Jesus face-to-face in all His royal splendor? The writer of Hebrews tells us to encourage each other as we see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:25). Finally! There will be peace because of King Jesus!

Amen! Come, Lord Jesus.

#### **ADULTS**

- Are you grafted into God's family? Have you repented of your sins and given your life to Jesus?
- 2. Are you abiding in Jesus? Are you making your relationship with Him a priority in your life?
- 3. Have you shared the reason for your hope with someone recently?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

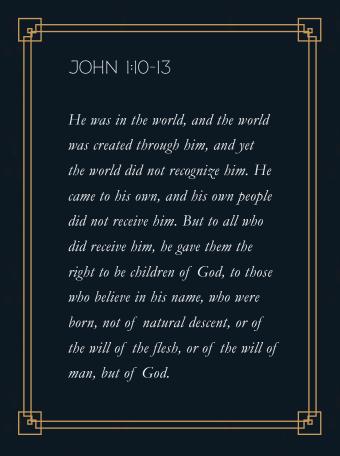
- 1. What traditions or activities help us stay focused on Jesus?
- 2. What traditions or activities distract us from Jesus?
- 3. Why is sharing our hope in Jesus important?

## DAILY PRAYER |

Father God, please help me know if I have placed my hope somewhere other than in Jesus. Lord, I am asking for wisdom and discernment as I see this world moving away from you. Help me share with others what you have done in my life. Jesus, may Your Kingdom come, and Your will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven. Amen.







## THE GIFT OF JESUS

Randi Chacon, Special Needs Director

In John 1:10-11, John says, Jesus came into the world that He created yet He was not recognized. He came to His own people, and they rejected Him. In our day-to-day lives, do you notice all the ways that we reject Jesus? In our human nature, we tend to want to live our lives the way that we feel would best benefit us.

In John 1:12-13, John says that all who accept Jesus become children of God and are reborn, not by a physical birth but a birth that only comes from God. God has given us a gift, one that we are worthy enough to receive for free! God gave us the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. When we choose to accept God's gift of walking with Christ, it is not something we have to pay for—it is something that transforms us. We will not pay for following Jesus when we reach the gates to His Kingdom. In fact, we get to live for eternity in Heaven with Him which is the ultimate gift that we could ever receive.

My encouragement to you is that no matter where you are in life, no matter how unworthy you feel, your salvation is always free. Jesus loves you where you are today, and He is ready for you to become a child of God.

#### **ADULTS**

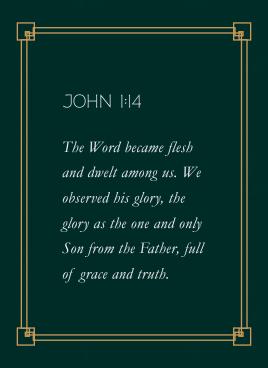
- 1. Have you ever felt unworthy of God's gift (Jesus) to you?
- 2. Do you live your day-to-day life on your own path or with Christ at the center of everything that you do?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. Do you know that Jesus loves you?
- 2. Have you accepted God's gift into your heart?

## DAILY PRAYER

Father in Heaven, please use my life to prepare the way for Jesus to come with his Good News into the lives of my friends, acquaintances, and family In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.



## HE BECAME FLESH

Todd Haymans, Discipleship Pastor

Eugene Peterson, popular scholar, theologian, and author, describes John 1:14 like this: "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish." John describes Jesus as the Word. The Word is the communication from the Father. So, Jesus, who was always with His Father, put on flesh and entered our lives, giving us new life.

Perhaps you have spent this Christmas season in a hurry. Maybe you haven't created intentional margin for Jesus to move into your neighborhood. Would you consider slowing down and asking God to re-enter your world? Remember, He loves you enough to pursue you. Jesus came to us! He desires to speak to you and live inside of you. He is full of grace and desires to be present in your life today.

#### **ADULTS**

- 1. Have you been in God's Word consistently? What obstacles keep you from the Bible and how can you remove them?
- 2. Just as Jesus has moved into our lives, we are called to enter in and minister to others. Who might you minister to during this season?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. Is there someone in your neighborhood that you can invite to church or encourage this week?
- 2. Can you pray for your friends and ask God to use you to minister to them?

#### DAILY PRAYER

Thank you for sending your son, Jesus, to be our Lord and Savior. We are overwhelmed and grateful that Jesus has moved into our lives and provided a way for us to have eternal life. Help us to love others well and point them to Jesus. Thank you for the greatest gift of all!

#### LUKE 1:26-38

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you." But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be. Then the angel told her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end." Mary asked the angel, "How can this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?" The angel replied to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. And consider your relative Elizabeth—even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called childless. For nothing will be impossible with God." "See, I am the Lord's servant," said Mary. "May it happen to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

յս

## ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE

Kurt Fehlis, Student Pastor

Have you ever been faced with the impossible? Maybe you came home to discover an emergency repair need with absolutely no money to spend in your bank account. Possibly the impossible situation has had to do with a relationship that was so damaged, so broken, that all hope was lost for restoration and healing. Or just maybe, your impossible situation was a lot simpler and had to do with the assembly of a bookshelf from a Swedish furniture store. I think no matter who we are or how old we are, this idea of having impossible circumstances and tasks shows up.

Mary is facing an impossible situation here in Luke 1. She is young, she doesn't come from wealth or social status, and she has plans for her life that soon include becoming a wife and not immediately becoming a mom. She has reasons to throw her hands up in frustration and to be discouraged by what is happening. But her response is the exact opposite! After the angel Gabriel explains what is to come, Mary humbly responds to accept and embrace the impossible situation ahead. She recognizes God's hand is in it and so she can be confident that He will make a way for her.

Gabriel's reminder to Mary, "For nothing will be impossible with God," is a reminder we all need to hold on to. We serve a God that will clear all barriers and all obstacles to accomplish His purposes. We serve a God that loves us deeply and values us. He will not abandon us to the impossible but will make a way for us to encounter Him personally and to trust him more fully. That is a great hope for this season!

#### **ADULTS**

- 1. What are some impossible situations that you have witnessed in your life or someone you know this past year? Have you been able to witness God's provision in those?
- 2. How can you prepare yourself to have a mindset like Mary and to submit to God's plans and provision when impossible and unexpected things happen?
- 3. Submission to God's plans always will involve both humility and trust. Are there areas of your life that you are not willing to submit and trust God with?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. It can be scary when unexpected things happen. How should we respond when we get scared by these things?
- 2. God had big plans for Mary, even though she was young. What is something that God is calling you to do for Him? How does this story give you confidence to go do it?

## DAILY PRAYER

Dear God, please help me to trust you when I am faced with difficult situations like Mary was and to be reminded that nothing is impossible with you. Thank you for loving and caring for us.





## LUKE 1:39-45

In those days Mary set out and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judah where she entered Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped inside her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and your child will be blessed! How could this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For you see, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped for joy inside me. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill what he has spoken to her!"

#### **FAITH**

#### Taylor Newton, Crosswalk Video Director/Production Associate

Wow! What an amazing meeting between two women the Lord was using! Earlier in Luke, we read about angels appearing to both women's families to announce their pregnancies. Both were susceptible to the temptations of stress, fear, or worry, especially considering Elizabeth's age (geriatric pregnancy), yet she is filled with joy and humbled favor for what God had done and was doing through the birth of our Lord.

During the Christmas season, we can easily get caught up in comparison, envy, stressing over details to impress others, or even jealousy. Luke 1:45 reminds us that God is faithful; He is not a God of broken promises, but He fulfills His promises. Perhaps you have an unanswered prayer on your mind this Christmas season and hearing about fulfilled promises is difficult. I encourage you to lean on the promise of His faithfulness, look at how He has shown goodness to your family, and celebrate our Lord!

#### **ADULTS**

- 1. What thoughts or feelings are preventing you from undeniable faith and praise of our Savior this season, as demonstrated by Elizabeth?
- 2. How has the Lord been faithful to you and your family this year?
- 3. Are there opportunities for you to repent for pride or lack of faith?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. Why does Christmas & Jesus' birth make you jump for joy?
- 2. How can we share that joy with others?

#### DAILY PRAYER

Lord, thank you for using Mary & Elizabeth out of love and favor for them, as well as us today. We rid our hearts of anything but praise and celebration. Thank you for your faithfulness and for being a God of fulfilled promises!



And Mary said: My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, because he has looked with favor on the humble condition of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed, because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and his name is holy. His mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear him. He has done a mighty deed with his arm; he has scattered the proud because of the thoughts of their hearts; he has toppled the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly. He has satisfied the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering his mercy to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he spoke to our ancestors. And Mary stayed with her about three months; then she returned to her home.

## OVERCOME WITH JOY

Wynn Morris, Minister to Young Adults

Have you ever been so overcome with joy that you simply could not keep quiet about it? Maybe it comes out in conversation with a friend or loved one, or with tears streaming down your face. Maybe God is doing something so amazing in your life, or He has provided for you in such an unimaginable way that you just had to express it somehow. This is what we find Mary doing in Luke 1:46-56. To this point, Mary, who is likely a teenager at this time, has been told that she will become pregnant before marriage and give birth to the long-awaited Savior. This seems like a lot of pressure, right? Who would want this assignment, especially so close to the biggest holiday of the year? How does Mary respond?

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Why does she respond this way? Because despite the circumstances, Mary knows that "the Mighty One has done great things for me, and His name is holy." Although these circumstances aren't ideal, Mary has prostrated herself humbly before God; she has the perspective and discernment to see that God is moving. She might not have 100% clarity on how God is moving, but she can see that cousin Elizabeth and Zechariah, people way past their prime, have been blessed. And now Mary, a young woman seemingly before her time, is blessed to know that even cousin John dances within the presence of his Savior from the womb. In a time of the subjugation and oppression of Rome and the elite of Jerusalem, the Savior is working in ways we could hardly imagine. God has remembered his mercy, and we, like Mary, should respond: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!"

#### **ADULTS**

- 1. When is the last time you were so overcome with joy that you couldn't contain it?
- 2. What are some of the circumstances you can remember God clearly delivering you from in the past? Considering God's past faithfulness, how can you trust God more during your present trials?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. Mary says that her soul magnifies the Lord, or it is "making much of God." What are some things in your life right now for which you can make much of God?
- Included in Mary's prayer, she says, "His mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear him." How has the Lord been faithful and merciful to your family through the generations? What have been some faithful decisions that generations of your family made in the past to bring you to where you are now?

#### → DAILY PRAYER ⊢

King Jesus, we are thankful in this season of Advent that you stepped out of Heaven and became one of us. You are a God who is not far off, but you are incredibly near to us. Moreover, we are thankful that you died the death that we should've died and have given us the life that you live. Our souls are stirred with praise at the thought that you gave your life to make us family with you. Jesus, we humbly ask for help to see the joy of life in you even during our broken circumstances. Help us to trust you more, even when it might be difficult for us to see that you are working. Amen.

#### LUKE 1:57-66

Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she had a son. Then her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her his great mercy, and they rejoiced with her. When they came to circumcise the child on the eighth day, they were going to name him Zechariah, after his father. But his mother responded, "No. He will be called John." Then they said to her, "None of your relatives has that name." So they motioned to his father to find out what he wanted him to be called. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they were all amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. Fear came on all those who lived around them, and all these things were being talked about throughout the hill country of Judea. All who heard about him took it to heart, saying, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the Lord's hand was with him.

#### **BLESSINGS**

#### Kevin Burdette, Minister to Senior Adults & Pastoral Care

The background of today's passage begins earlier in the chapter (read Luke 1:5-25). Zechariah, who is a priest in the temple in Jerusalem was visited by Gabriel, an angel of the Lord. Gabriel had amazing news that Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a baby. This baby would be a joy and delight to all because he would be great in the sight of the Lord. The angel also told Zechariah his son was to be named John (which means "The Lord is gracious)." Zechariah could not believe this because he and his wife were "well along in years." He said, "How can I be sure of all this?" The angel's response was not what Zechariah expected. He said, "Because you did not believe the good news of the Lord you will not be able to speak until all these things come true in their proper time." Throughout his wife's entire pregnancy Zechariah could not speak. That had to be hard for a preacher!

When the baby was eight days old, Zechariah's entire community of family and friends gathered to celebrate the birth and the naming of the baby boy. Everyone expected him to be named Zach Jr. But Elizabeth said, "No! He is to be called John." Everyone was confused because this did not follow the tradition of naming a boy after his father. The crowd looked to Zechariah to get his response. Because he could not speak, he took a tablet and wrote definitively "His Name IS John." Immediately after making this declaration, Zechariah could speak again. His curse of not being able to speak was removed because he had come to believe what the angel had told him. After more than nine months and eight days of complete silence, Zechariah went all over the countryside speaking and praising God for what He had done. It was only a few months later angels announced another miraculous birth of a baby named Emmanuel, "God with us."

Today we still talk about these two babies. One known as John the Baptist who was anointed by God to "Prepare the Way for the Lord." The other baby known who is God's perfect sacrifice for all mankind. His name IS Jesus.

#### **ADULTS**

- Like Zechariah, are there times in your life when you haven't fully trusted God's word?
- 2. What are the consequences, or missed blessings, because you didn't trust God's word to be true?
- 3. Do you spend time each day simply listening to what the Lord is trying to say to you? He likely has "Good News of great joy" for you.

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. Just like the baby boy in our scripture passage today, do you know that God has a unique and wonderful plan for your life?
- 2. What are ways you can share with your family and friends what God has done for you?

#### → DAILY PRAYER ⊢

God, thank you for sharing your truth and salvation with us. Please teach us to trust and know every word you speak is truth on which we can build our lives.





#### MATTHEW 1:18-21

The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way:

After his mother Mary had been engaged to

Joseph, it was discovered before they came together
that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit. So
her husband, Joseph, being a righteous man, and
not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to
divorce her secretly. Bet after he had considered
these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to
him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David,
don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife,
because what has been conceived in her is from
the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and
you are to name him Jesus, because he will save
his people from their sins.'

## SUBMIT YOURSELF

Mark Clifton, Associate Pastor - Flint

Many times Joseph is seen as a secondary character in the story of the birth of Jesus. Spending some time seeing this story through Joseph's eyes will give us some insight on why Joseph deserves our admiration. Joseph was confronted with the reality that Mary, his fiancé, was with child before their union. He suspected Mary of wrongdoing and made up his mind that he would quietly break off the engagement.

However, when the Angel of the Lord told Joseph that the child in Mary's womb was from Holy Spirit and would save the people from their sins, Joseph believed the angel and trusted in God. We know that Joseph named his son Jesus as the angel directed. Joseph, a righteous man (v19), was willing to submit his will to God and walk in faith during a difficult situation. His step of obedience would lead to him being the earthly Father to the long-awaited Messiah.

#### **ADULTS**

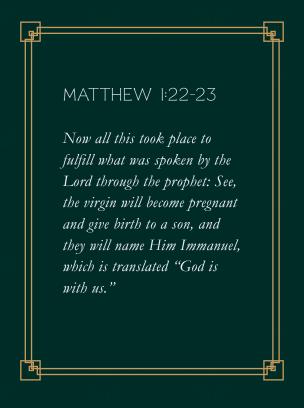
- 1. Why would it have been difficult for Joseph to stay engaged to Mary?
- 2. How did Joseph show submission to God?
- 3. How might Joseph's story be different if he hadn't submitted to God?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. How did Joseph show faith in God?
- 2. How do we need to submit to God like Joseph did?
- 3. What might we miss out on if we don't trust God like Joseph?

#### DAILY PRAYER

Father, I pray that in all things we would submit to your will like Joseph did. I pray that we would always consider what You would have us do. Please give us wisdom to see your direction when you're leading us through difficult decisions. Thank you for the example of faith and obedience Joseph is to us. May we exhibit the same faith and obedience in our lives each day.



#### **PURPOSE**

#### Taylor Gibson, Women's Ministry Associate

In these verses, Matthew is referencing the prophecies we find in the Old Testament that describe the coming Messiah and how He would enter the world. As we read Isaiah 7:14, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel," we get to see God's intentionality and purpose from the very beginning. Every word of the Lord will come to pass. There is security in that for believers. When we see something in the Bible, we can count on it. God had a plan long before Mary entered the scene. These verses give us hope and encouragement today as we are reminded of the sovereign, but also compassionate, heart of God. Whether you are experiencing joy or sorrow today, our Messiah, King Jesus, has and will continue to have a plan and a purpose.

We also see in this passage the name Immanuel given to Jesus. This means "God with us." Again, we get to see the intentionality and heart of our God. What an encouragement it is to know that we have a God who is with us in every moment. Prior to Jesus' birth, people had to meet with God at the temple through leaders. Because of Jesus' miraculous birth and God's sovereign plan, we now have access to God directly.

#### **ADULTS**

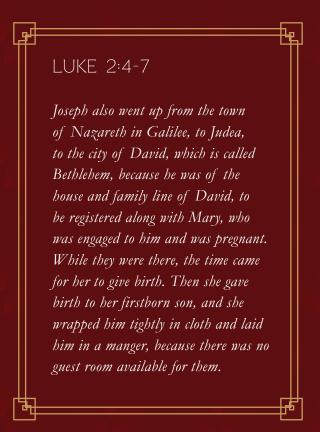
- 1. How does the reminder that things we go through take place for a purpose offer hope to you today?
- 2. What does it mean to you to know God is with us in every moment?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. How does knowing God is with you change the way you live?
- 2. Who is one person you can share the good news that God is with us today?

## DAILY PRAYER

Father, thank you for giving purpose to our life. Thank you for being present with us. I pray that we would not lose sight of your truth or the gift you have given us.



#### Phil Caturan, Campus Pastor – Filipino

In 2012, the Philippines unveiled the tourism slogan called, "It's more fun in the Philippines!" The slogan not only promoted tourism but also represented the joyful culture of the Filipinos. Generally, we are happy and resilient people and can crack jokes even after losing everything from typhoons, floods, and other disasters.

Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem, but not as tourists. They did it because of their obedience to God and to authority. They were resilient. Even though the travel was difficult, and Mary was about to give birth, they kept on. One could imagine their stress level! But when the time finally came and the Baby was born in a manger, not in a high-profile place for the King of kings and Lord of lords, prophecy was fulfilled.

This is not only "more fun," but this is the best and greatest joy, not only to Joseph and Mary but to the entire world: the Savior was born! Why would God send Jesus into the world to die for sinners like you and me? It is because God loves you! John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life." This is not only the greatest joy but also the greatest gift that God offered to us – the gift of eternal life.

#### **ADULTS**

- Would you like to accept the gift of eternal life by placing your faith in Jesus Christ?
- 2. How would you feel if you go on a vacation and the hotel that you reserved was given to someone else and all the hotels in the area were fully booked too? What would you do to not ruin your entire vacation?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

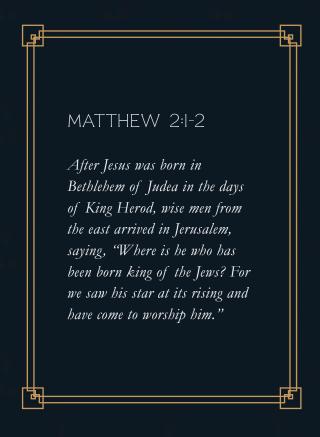
1. What is the most fun thing you are looking forward this season?

#### DAILY PRAYER

Lord, thank you for sending your Son into the world. Thank you, Jesus, for dying on the cross to pay for my sins. Thank you, Jesus, that you rose from the grave. And non everything is possible because you conquered the grave. Thank you. Help us live a life that is always erateful for your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.







## THE GIFT Dustin Lee. Kids Pastor

It's the most wonderful time of the year! Christmas is my favorite holiday for many reasons. I love all of the family traditions such as baking cookies, family gatherings, decorating the Christmas tree and Christmas lights. Did you ever drive around just to look at Christmas lights as a kid? This was a family tradition for me as a kid and still is to this day. One of my favorite places to look at Christmas lights was at my grandmother and grandfather's home. My favorite part about the Christmas lights was a vintage plastic nativity set. It included all the characters from the birth of Christ, including the wise men. We do not know how many wise men came to see Jesus. Contrary to popular belief, the wise men were not present at the nativity. The wise men came to visit Jesus by the time that Mary and Joseph were living in the house, and Jesus was a toddler when the wise men met him.

Yes, the wise men brought Jesus gifts, but their number one reason for searching for Jesus was to come and worship the newborn King. We, too, have the opportunity to seek after and worship Jesus today in our personal relationship with him. When we repent of our sins and follow Jesus, God forgives us and we find that there is life and hope in Jesus. At the birth of Christ, people were drawn to the hope of Jesus. Jesus desires a personal relationship with each of us. It is available to each person if they choose to receive the most precious gift of all, Jesus.

#### **ADULTS**

- 1. How can we share Jesus at Christmas with others?
- How can we worship Jesus more than just with songs? How can we worship Him?
- 3. How did you find hope in Jesus?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. What is the best gift that you ever gave?
- 2. What is the greatest gift that Jesus ever gave?

## DAILY PRAYER

Jesus, help me to seek and trust you with all my life. No matter what my ircumstances may be, help me to trust, follow, seek, and have faith in you. Thank you that you desire to be my forever best friend and for the gift of salvation.

#### LUKE 2:25-35

There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, looking forward to Israel's consolation, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he saw the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, he entered the temple. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him up in his arms, praised God, and said, 'Now, Master, you can dismiss your servant in peace, as you promised. For my eyes have seen your salvation. You have prepared it in the presence of all peoples— a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel.' His father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and told his mother Mary, "Indeed, this child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed— and a sword will pierce your own soul—that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

## HOPE IN GOD'S PROMISES

John Roach, Missions Pastor

In Luke 2:25-35, we encounter the poignant story of Simeon, a righteous and devout man who had been eagerly awaiting the fulfillment of God's promise to see the Messiah before his death. Led by the Holy Spirit, Simeon enters the temple and recognizes the infant Jesus as the fulfillment of God's salvation plan. Overflowing with gratitude and joy, Simeon offers a beautiful prayer of blessing and prophetic insight, acknowledging Jesus as a light to all people and the glory of Israel.

Simeon's patient hope, unwavering faith, and profound recognition of the divine promise invite us to consider our own personal reflection. Take a moment and examine your posture toward God's promises. Think about the last week and reflect on our own attitudes toward waiting upon God's promises, recognizing His presence in unexpected ways, and embracing the light of Christ that dispels the darkness in our lives.

#### **ADULTS**

- 1. Are there promises of God in your life that you've grown weary of waiting for? How can Simeon's example inspire you to maintain patient hope?
- 2. In what unexpected places or moments have you encountered the presence of Christ recently? How can you cultivate a more attentive heart to recognize His work around you?
- 3. How can you, like Simeon, proclaim the light of Christ to those around you, becoming a beacon of hope and salvation to others?
- Write down the name of someone who needs to hear about Jesus. \_\_\_\_\_\_ Will you begin praying for them this week to be open to the light of the gospel? Will you commit to sharing the hope of Jesus with them before the new year?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. As a family, discuss a time when you experienced God's faithfulness in fulfilling a promise. How did that strengthen your trust in Him?
- 2. How can your family create intentional moments of worship and reflection to foster a deeper awareness of Christ's presence in your lives?
- 3. Who can you start praying for as a family to come to faith in Christ? Will you commit to being intentional and attempt to build a relationship of care? Will you commit to sharing the gospel with them?

## DAILY PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we are humbled by the example of Simeon, whose patient hope and faithful heart allowed him to witness the arrival of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Help us to hold fast to Your promises, even when the waiting is long and difficult. Open our eyes to see Your presence in the ordinary and extraordinary moments of our lives. May we, like Simeon, become bearers of Your light and love, sharing the message of salvation with those around us. Guide our family in nurturing a deeper relationship with You, recognizing Your faithfulness, and rejoicing in the gift of Your Son.

## ISAIAH 9:2-5

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness. You have enlarged the nation and increased its joy. The people have rejoiced before you as they rejoice at harvest time and as they rejoice when dividing spoils. For you have shattered their oppressive yoke and the rod on their shoulders, the staff of their oppressor, just as you did on the day of Midian. For every trampling boot of battle and the bloodied garments of war will be burned as fuel for the fire.

## LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Debbie Stuart, Women's Minister

These words describe the condition of our world today. Sin and evil have created darkness and people have walked away from the things of God. In times of darkness and despair we may feel our sorrow and troubles will never end, but we find great hope from this passage, and we can take comfort from these promises.

I love this passage because God promises 2 things:

- 1. Light in darkness and depression
- 2. Joy in deliverance and freedom from oppression

Light has a name, and it is Jesus! Jesus refers to himself as the "light of the world" (John 8:12), and He has given His Word as a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path" (Psalm 119:105).

When you find yourself in darkness brought on by difficulties, depression, shattered dreams, or seemingly unanswered prayer, take a moment to reflect on these verses and let the light of our Savior shine on you! You will rejoice again. (vs. 3) And let's take this one step further and use the light that we have been given to shine in a dark world! Now, go be SHINY!

#### **ADULTS**

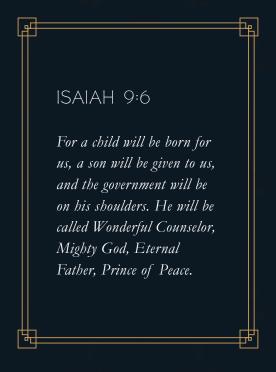
- 1. What words of hope do you find in these scriptures?
- 2. What has God promised that can sustain you through life's darkest times and weakest moments?
- 3. Are you walking in the light God has given you?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

1. How can you be a light in a dark world?

#### DAILY PRAYER +

Lord, You are the light of the world and we bless You and acknowledge our dependence on You. Thank You that we never have to be in darkness. Help us to shine Your light on others around us. Thank You for the wonderful prophecies and promises of Isaiah and the hope we have in Christ.



#### PEACE

#### Ken Brumley, Congregational Care Minister

Today, we will focus upon the last description Isaiah used to identify who the Messiah would be. Jesus would be the Prince of Peace. Over 400 times throughout scriptures, Jesus, the prophets, and His apostles would use the word "peace" both as an attitude and a command. Peace was the focus at both His birth and death. At the birth of Jesus, the Angels spoke of peace. "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." (Luke 2:14) And then on the last night of His earthly life, Jesus said in John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

At the time of Jesus' birth, the conditions of the world were much like our own. Under Roman rule, there was chaos and turmoil. People lived daily with prejudice and hearts filled with anger and hate. At that moment in time, God, in His infinite wisdom, chose to send His Son into this world who would be called the Prince of Peace.

Is it possible to have peace when it seems to be so hard to find? The answer is not in where you look for peace but to whom you look for peace. Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace." (John 16:33) Apart from Jesus, there is no peace. The Apostle Paul stated, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace." (Colossians 3:2) Peace is found in the confidence of knowing who Jesus is and that His promises are true. In Him and Him alone will we find peace.

#### **ADULTS**

- An adjective is a word that describes the subject. ("Hot" weather) What adjectives would you use to describe what peace looks or feels like?
- In the Beatitudes, (Matt. 5:9) Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God." Not only are we to have a heart filled with peace, but we are also called to be "peacemakers." When we are makers of peace, what are we doing?

#### STUDENTS & KIDS

- 1. In our family, we may not get our way. We may be disappointed that we do not get what we want. The Bible says that Jesus came to us to be peace and give us peace. How can we be like Jesus when we are upset with our parents or each other?
- 2. The Apostle Paul said, "Let the peace of Christ 'rule' in your heart." The word "rule" here does not mean something you do or do not do. It means something or someone who is in control of your life. A king is a ruler over a country and lays out the rules of living. What is it like when Jesus is allowed to be Ruler over our hearts?

#### DAILY PRAYER +

Our heavenly Father, we thank you for sending your son, Jesus, so that we may experience true peace. This day we will choose to trust you and place our confidence in you so that we may experience peace in all our circumstances. We acknowledge that we are called to be makers of peace.

May we give your peace to all we meet in our words and deeds.

# CHRISTMAS

GREEN





gabc.org





