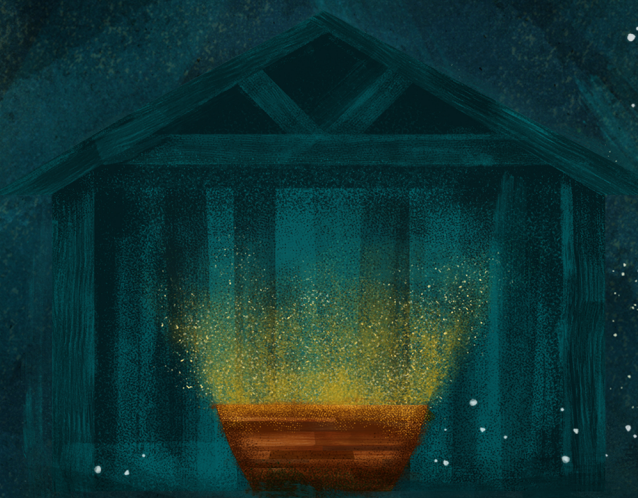


# EXPECTANT

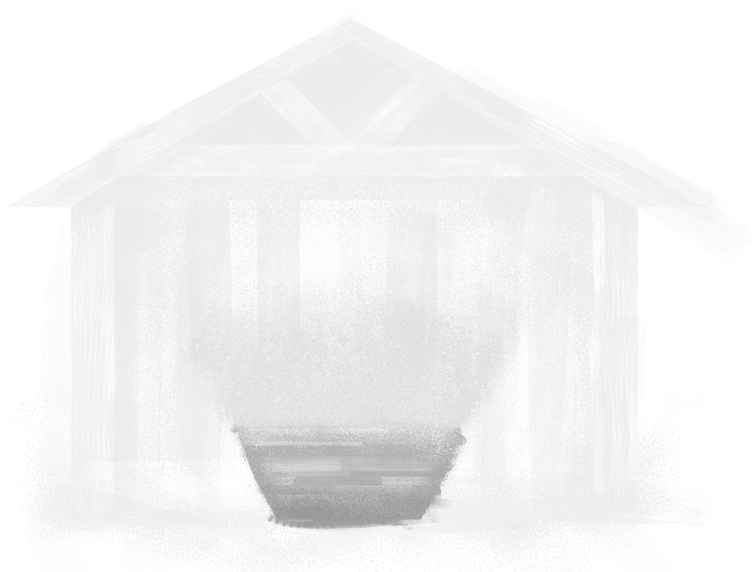
WORTH THE WAIT



AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL  
2024

# EXPECTANT

WORTH THE WAIT



AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL  
2024

## INTRODUCTION

Expectant. It is a word often associated with a mother awaiting the birth of her baby. The period following the announcement of the pregnancy is to be a season of expectant hope. The arrival of the child is the fulfillment of its promise.

Few things epitomize Christian hope and its fulfillment more than the Nativity of Jesus. Yet, the season of waiting—and the associated expectations—was far longer than Mary's nine-month pregnancy. The wait spanned thousands of years. Promise after promise was given about a future Messiah, but generations would come and go before those promises were realized.

In Matthew's Gospel, the Christmas story does not begin with the birth of Jesus. It commences with Jesus' family tree, His genealogy. You may be tempted to rush past this list of names to get to the Nativity story, but if you do so, you may miss the reminder that God is faithful, and that Jesus is the fulfillment of our hope.

During our Advent celebration and through this devotional, we invite you to reflect upon the lineage of Jesus in light of His birth. Along the way, you will encounter an interesting cast of characters with

a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Some are faithful, others have regrettable pasts, but all desperately needed the hope of salvation that only Jesus could offer. As you expectantly anticipate Christmas Day, our desire for you through this journey is that you will find that the birth of Jesus was worth the wait.

This Advent devotional has been written by the Pastors of First Baptist Church of Ocala. We have invited three of our mission partners to contribute as well. We pray that it is a blessing to you this Christmas.

Merry Christmas!

Your Pastors







# WEEK 1



DECEMBER 2

ABRAHAM AND ISAAC  
THE LORD WILL PROVIDE

*When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. When Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said...“Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, “The Lord will provide.”*

Genesis 22:9-14  
*from Genesis 22:1-18*

God is God who provides. In the Garden, He provided all that was needed. After each element of creation, God declared that it was *good* – what He had created was exactly as He intended and would fulfill His purposes perfectly. He created Adam, and later Eve, and told them they had all they needed to eat and all the work they needed to do, as God’s stewards, tending to His creation. From the hand of God, they had nourishment, work and purpose, and fellowship with one another and with God. God provided.

Centuries later, as God prepared to do a mighty work through Abraham, God showed that He is still God who provides. God tested Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice his only son Isaac as an offering to the Lord

(vv.1-2). When Isaac noticed that they had all the provisions to make the offering except the offering itself, by faith, Abraham responded by saying, “*God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son*” (v.8). Later, as Abraham was in the very act of raising his knife to slay his son, the Lord intervened and provided a substitute—a ram—which Abraham sacrificed instead (vv.10-13). He passed the test; and his faith that God would provide led to God’s blessing of Abraham and promise to bless the nations:

*By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice* (vv.15-18).

Abraham and his offspring were to be part of the fulfillment of the promise that God had first given in the Book of Genesis. It was a declaration that Satan would be overcome, and his defeat would come at the hands of Eve’s offspring (Genesis 3:15). This future Messiah would bring about the blessing of the nations that God promised Abraham. It was this promise that mankind watched and yearned for. The sin that entered the world through the rebellion of Adam and Eve would be atoned through the sacrifice of the Messiah centuries later.


DECEMBER 2 cont.

But when? God promised Abraham that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through his offspring, but He revealed little about the timing. Just as God had done in the Garden when He promised Satan that sin would be dealt with, He did so again here... a promise with a timeline that could not be known by humanity.

And so, mankind followed the pattern of Abraham—trusting that God will provide—while waiting and watching for the Messiah. The wait took a while, but God again showed Himself faithful to provide. As Paul declared in Galatians 4:4, *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*

During this Advent season, be like Abraham. Trust that God will provide, because He does!

~ Pastor Monty

 *Dear Lord, You have repeatedly proven Yourself to be true to Your word. Please give me the faith of Abraham. Help me to trust Your provision long before I get to see it happen.*



DECEMBER 3

JACOB  
GOD PERSISTS

*The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."*

Genesis 32:22-28

I love *The Santa Clause*. The movie centers around a character named Scott Calvin who causes Santa to fall from his roof when Scott startled him one Christmas Eve. When Scott runs over to get a closer look, all he finds is Santa's empty red suit. With Santa missing and unable to complete his Christmas deliveries, Scott puts on the suit and delivers presents in Santa's absence. The chaos of that night leads him to realize how inadequate he was to be Santa. However, because he put on Santa's suit, he discovers that he has agreed to become the new Santa and soon begins to experience a strange transformation. A power overtakes him that morphs him into jolly old St. Nick: He gains a ton of weight and grows a bushy white beard, and children begin insisting that they sit on his lap

DECEMBER 3 cont.

to tell him what they want for Christmas! The power of the Santa *clause* touched him and transformed him.

In the genealogy of Jesus, we find Jacob, a character who shares similarities with Scott Calvin. Jacob was a man full of fears and inadequacies: His youth was filled with family conflict, and his uncle Laban had cheated him for years. He becomes deeply distressed when he learns that his brother Esau has vowed to kill him and is on his way to see him. Fearing for his family, he split them into two groups, trusting that they could avoid complete annihilation if they were in two places. While alone through the night, Jacob was approached by a man who began to wrestle with him. Jacob, with all his strength, wrestles this man. When Jacob's strength does not give up, the man touches Jacob's hip socket and takes his strength. We ultimately learn the man Jacob had been wrestling with was God Himself.

To this point in Jacob's story, his anxieties controlled him. Deception and conflict within his family defined him – and he was guilty of deception, too. He had come to the place in his life where he could not fight his battles, nor could he protect his family. Because of this, his own strength had to give way. Jacob had to learn a new way of living and be introduced to a new power. The blessing of God in Jacob's life is that God persisted with him, overcoming Jacob's inadequate strength to provide Him with faith in His adequate strength. Having wrestled with God, Jacob was physically weakened yet spiritually strengthened. This newfound spiritual strength and






dependence led Jacob to a place of blessing – even healing his relationship with Esau.

Christian, with the story of Jacob's wrestling with God, we get a picture of the persistent love and determined grace most clearly seen in Jesus. Christmas represents the actions of a God who knows what we need, even when it hurts. As we celebrate Christ's coming, take heart at a God who steps into the arena of your pain and consider what this grace looks like for you.

~ Pastor BJ

 *Father, thank You for Your grace of Christmas, that You would step into our pain to overcome all pain. I praise You for the powerful transforming grace that is slowly growing me to see as You see and act as You act. Help me see where grace is needed and where I must depend more on You and Your strength. Overcome my inadequacies with Your strength.*



DECEMBER 4

**JUDAH AND HIS BROTHERS  
GOD PRESERVES HIS PROMISE**

*As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.*

Genesis 50:20

Christmas—the most wonderful time of the year—ushers in family gatherings and get-togethers. The holidays often provide a rare opportunity for family members to see one another. Due to busy schedules and living proximity, many families do not spend much time together throughout the year. This means that Christmas, the season of perpetual hope and glad tidings, can often be stressful and challenging due to family dynamics. Few stories in scripture capture the idea of family struggle better than Judah and his brothers. If you think your family has challenges, sit back with a cup of hot cocoa and read about this family.

Jacob had two wives, Leah and Rachel. Jacob shared ten sons with Leah and two sons with Rachel. These twelve sons make up the twelve tribes of Israel. The only one of the sons mentioned by name in Jesus' genealogy is Judah, but he's not the one we usually think of first when we think of Jacob's sons. If you are like me, you immediately think of Joseph. It was unimaginable that Jacob would choose a favorite child, but he did with Joseph. If you think back, Jacob's parents—Isaac and Rebekah—also played the favored child game, and it nearly destroyed their family. Now, as a father, Jacob followed in his parent's footsteps, and it provoked conflict between Joseph and his brothers,

leading them to sell Joseph into slavery. Ultimately, the story of Judah and his brothers would become one of forgiveness, loyalty, and reconciliation, but getting to that happy ending was quite a journey.

It is impossible to read the entire story of this family and not believe that God had an incredible plan that He was weaving together. Jacob, while weak and nearing the end of his life, blessed his sons and told them they would bow down to Judah (Genesis 49:1-27). Jacob called Judah a lion—an indication of strength and power—and said Judah would one day rule. Judah, the brother who suggested selling Joseph to the Ishmaelites, who was later tricked into fathering children by his widowed daughter-in-law, Tamar, became an ancestor of Jesus. From early times, Jesus has been referred to as the Lion of Judah (Hosea 5:14), honoring Him and His ancestor, Judah.

What Joseph's brothers meant for evil, God meant for good (Genesis 50:20). What Judah's daughter-in-law, Tamar, meant for evil, God meant for good. Trust that when you are a Christ follower the journey may not always be easy and trouble and difficulty may come, but God will always see you through. What the Enemy means for evil, God can use for good! This story also reminds us that when God makes a promise, He will also work on our behalf to preserve it.


Examine your life and see where God is working amid difficulty. How are you responding to this trial? Do you



DECEMBER 4 cont.

need to adjust your attitude or response to what you are facing? Do you believe God can use what the Enemy means for evil for good?

~ Pastor Danny

 *Father, please help me to seek You in every season of my life and trust that even in difficulty, You are at work. Help me to trust You always. Use the difficulty in my life for my good and Your glory. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*



DECEMBER 5

RAHAB

## DELIVERANCE FROM ONE'S PAST

*By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.*

Hebrews 11:31

The Nativity story features several unexpected characters, including a teenage girl pregnant out of wedlock, a carpenter's son, and lowly shepherds. So, it should be no surprise that Jesus' earthly genealogy includes a few as well, and one would be hard-pressed to find someone more unexpected than Rahab. She enters the story of God's people as they were about to enter the land God had given them. (Read Joshua 2:1-24.)

This was a huge moment. Israel had been waiting 40 years. They'd failed God's first invitation to enter the Promised Land, fearing men over their God. But now that entire generation had died out, God gave them a second chance.

Joshua sent spies ahead. They likely prayed beforehand. But did they expect God to answer through a prostitute? Likely not. What do you think? Can God do amazing things even through the most flawed people? And yet, in God's wisdom, perhaps someone used to living at the margins of society and morality was perfectly placed to help these spies. Why did she deceive her king? Because, unlike Israel 40 years earlier, she knew there was a greater power in town. She knew the battle was already won. She'd heard of the great God of Israel (see Exodus 23:27). And so, she came to Him for deliverance. By faith, Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient


DECEMBER 5 cont.

(Hebrews 11:31). Despite this woman's past, when she turned to God, she was saved. Moreover, she was used greatly for his kingdom.

Do you need reminding that, whatever your past, the victorious king welcomes you? That He embraces you with nail marks through His hands, because He died in your place? This is the king born 2,000 years ago. And He is your king.

Do you believe He can do great things through the *greatest of sinners* who turn to Him? He has shown us time and time again. Let's follow Him with boldness.

~ David Seckington  
Church Planter  
Shepherd's Church  
West London, England

 *Father, thank You for delivering me from my past. Help me to believe You can use me and anyone who follows You for Your Kingdom. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



DECEMBER 6

BOAZ AND RUTH  
THE KINSMAN-REDEEMER

*He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer."*

Ruth 3:9  
*from Ruth 3:1-4:17*

I love the Book of Ruth. It is a story of commitment, Ruth's commitment to her mother-in-law Naomi and her commitment to Boaz. It is also the story of Boaz fulfilling the role of kinsmen-redeemer to Ruth.

In almost every wedding I perform, I quote words from Ruth found in chapter one:

*Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for where you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me.*

(Ruth 1:16-17)

These are strong words of commitment, but they have nothing to do with marriage. Ruth shares this commitment with her mother-in-law, Naomi, after the loss of her father-in-law and her husband. Ruth is headed to Bethlehem with Naomi, and this sets the stage for a beautiful love story and the birth of a son. This son will become David's grandfather, and Boaz and Ruth will be placed in the lineage of Jesus.

Naomi's husband had died as well as both of her sons, including the husband of Ruth. This left both poor and





DECEMBER 6 cont.

without a male protector. After arriving in Bethlehem, Ruth works in the fields of Boaz and earns food for herself and Naomi. She also falls in love with Boaz and desires to be his wife. However, there was someone else who potentially stood in the way of her hopes and dreams. According to the custom of those days, the nearest male relative had the first right of refusal to purchase the land that belonged to Naomi's family. If he took possession of the land, he would become Naomi and Ruth's *kinsman-redeemer*. He would also be expected to take Ruth to be his wife and bear children through her in order to keep the family name intact. Ruth was surely relieved when the nearest relative chose not to purchase Naomi's land, and Boaz stepped in as kinsman-redeemer to marry her. Boaz and Ruth then secured their place in Jesus' genealogy when they became parents of Obed, whose son was Jesse, the father of David.

Ruth's story is a picture of how Jesus is our Kinsman-Redeemer. He paid the price for our redemption, became our protector, and made us a child of the King. As we celebrate His birth this Advent season, let's rejoice in the fact that we have been redeemed by the blood of the precious Lamb of God.

~ Pastor Ed

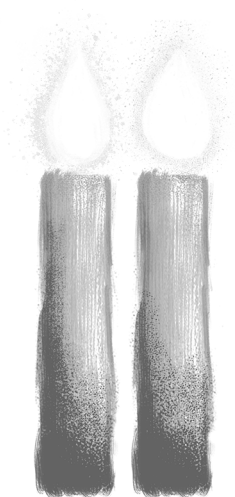
 *Dear Father, thank You for sending Your Son to be our Kinsman-Redeemer. Through His sacrifice on the cross we have been redeemed and made a part of Your forever family. Thank You for this precious gift of eternal life.*







# WEEK 2



DECEMBER 9

JESSE  
THE ROOT OF JESSE

*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.*

*In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.*

Isaiah 11:1-3a, 10


The irony of the Christmas Tree is lost on most of us. We decorate freshly cut evergreens to celebrate the birth of the Christ and the new life He represents while failing to notice that the tree—once cut—is dying and will soon be dead. Somewhere, there is a stump from that tree that stands as a reminder that what was once alive is now gone. Can new life spring forth from the withering stump? A prophecy associated with Jesse, an earthly ancestor of Jesus, provides a hopeful answer.

Jesse was a minor character in the lineage of Jesus. He is known mostly for being from Bethlehem and the father of one of the most famous characters in the Bible, David. We are introduced to Jesse when the prophet Samuel anoints David as king instead of his older brothers (1 Samuel 16:1-13). This unknown personality emerges from relative obscurity to become a major influencer in ensuring Israel's royal line. It would also be through this kingly line that the future Messiah would come. And, yes, this Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, too (Micah 5:2), just like Jesse.

Jesse's son, David, was promised that his descendants would establish an eternal kingdom: *I will raise up your offspring after you...and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever* (2 Samuel 7:12-13). Unfortunately, David's kingdom didn't stay intact for long. Eventually, the nation divided into two, and the future of the royal line seemed dead as a stump when God's people were sent into exile over their persistent disobedience. Yet, about 100 years before they lost their kingdom, Isaiah invoked Jesse's name when he prophesied, *There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse* (v.3) and *the root of Jesse...shall stand as a signal for the peoples* (v.10). It was a message of hope that new life would come and that the promise given to David would be fulfilled. Can new life spring forth from a withering stump? The answer is yes!

As you continue to reflect on Jesus' family tree, remember that Jesus is the *root of Jesse*. In Him, new life can be found out of death. Jesus didn't just renew the withering stump of Jesse's line. He extends the offer of new life to all peoples and nations (v.10), including you.

~ Pastor Darren

 *Lord, I am grateful that You bring about new life out of death. Thank You also for the reminder that You remain true to Your promises.*



DECEMBER 10

DAVID

## A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

*And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you."*

1 Samuel 13:13-14

What does it mean to pursue someone's heart? The heart is the center of a person, their essence, their passion factory, and the place from which their emotions and character get their compass. It is the well from which the very nature and truest desires of a person flows. To pursue someone's heart is to seek after them for who they are, not necessarily for what they do. It requires dedication, study, communication, and intense, intimate relationship.

In 1 Samuel 13, we read about Saul's foolish decision in reaction to an approaching Philistine army. Facing impending doom and needing the favor of God, Saul decided to take matters into his own hands by offering sacrifices to God without the Prophet Samuel present. While it may have seemed like a noble thing to do, it was against the commandment of God and His law. Thus, God rendered Saul's kingship tainted and subsequently set the stage for David, a shepherd boy, to one day take over as king of Israel.

David was most famously labeled as a man *after God's own heart* because he valued the pursuit of God's heart




above all else. King Saul was set up as Israel's first king but proved to be unworthy of the kingship due to his pride and lack of obedience. He failed to pursue the heart of God and offered an improper sacrifice when he should have just obeyed. As Samuel corrected Saul in 1 Samuel 15:22a: *Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice.*

Wow! This has got to be one of the best glimpses into the heart of God in all of the Scriptures! Unlike Saul, David later exhibits the pursuit of God's heart by describing how God's heart works: *The Lord watches over those who obey him, those who trust in his constant love.* (Psalm 33:18)

God watched over David because of his obedience to the Lord. David wasn't perfect, but he sought after God with his whole heart. The Bible tells us that God is love (1 John 4:16), and the key to reaching the epicenter of the heart of God—the very origin of love—is through obedience. Because of his obedience, David's kingdom was established forever and through his line, the Messiah would one day come.

~ Pastor David

 *Lord, let my prayer today be that of Psalm 119:76-77: "May Your unfailing love be my comfort, according to Your promise to Your servant. Let Your compassion come to me that I may live, for Your law is my delight." Amen.*

DECEMBER 11

SOLOMON

## A WISE KING BORN OUT OF ADULTERY

*And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you.*

1 Kings 3:6

Sometimes I feel like a big, fat failure. I think about all the ways that I fall short of who God has called me to be and it seems like I'm hopeless. I sin a lot! I would like to think my sins are secret, but I know that God sees it all. When I add up all the ways I sin, it seems as though I am a lost cause. I'm not sure why God picked me, but I'm sure He regrets it.

Yet, God doesn't see things that way. As Isaiah 55:8 reminds us, *For my thoughts are not your thoughts and your ways are not my ways.* God absolutely sees all of our sin. We cannot hide them from Him. Likewise, He is a righteous judge who does not let guilt go unpunished. However, He is also a loving Father who can see our hearts, our victories and our shortcomings. He knows the ways we will fall short, and He has already made a plan.

In 2 Samuel 11:1-27, we observe one of King David's greatest failures. Here is the king who God Himself called *a man after my own heart*, sinning against God and man. He commits adultery with another man's wife, gets her pregnant, and tries to cover it up. When his *Plan A* cover-up fails, King David arranges for Bathsheba's husband to be murdered as a *Plan B*. When the deed was done, David

assumed that he had successfully concealed his sin. But God knew and *considered what David had done to be evil.*


If the story ended there, we would probably rate David among the list of failed kings. But that wasn't the end. Bathsheba became the mother of King Solomon. In 1 Kings 3:4-15, God offers Solomon his heart's desire. *And Solomon replied, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and uprightness of heart toward you."* That's probably not how we would have described David! Solomon asks for wisdom. God grants him wisdom...and everything else! He becomes the greatest king in the history of God's people. David, Solomon, and Bathsheba are all mentioned in Matthew 1:6 as part of Christ's lineage in the Christmas story!

If God can use an adulterous murderer in the lineage of Jesus, there is hope for you and me this Christmas! God has a plan for your life and is actively working to bring it about. He has accounted for your shortcomings and failures. This isn't an excuse to keep sinning—we are called to holiness in Christ—but it is a praise that God can use even our broken pieces to make something beautiful. During this season, confess your sins to the Lord. Then, ask Him expectantly how He wants to use you for His glory.

~ Matthew McDonald  
Church Planter  
Waypoint Church  
Boise, Idaho



DECEMBER 11 cont.

 King Jesus, You already know the many ways I fall short of Your glory. I have put my own desires ahead of You and it leaves me feeling worthless for Your Kingdom's work. This Christmas season, help me to fix my eyes on You. Thank You for the hope that comes from knowing You make beautiful things from my broken pieces. As I live in the joy of Your forgiveness, help me to see how You would use me to be a blessing to others.



DECEMBER 12

JORAM/JEHORAM  
A REBELLIOUS KING

*Yet the Lord was not willing to destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that he had made with David, and since he had promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever.*

2 Chronicles 21:7  
*from 2 Chronicles 21:1-20*

Have you ever noticed that Christmas movies are typically centered around the same plotline? In *The Christmas Carol*, Scrooge goes from greedy to generous. In *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, Grinch's small heart grows three times larger than it was. Why are these types of stories so common? It's because they resonate with each of us. Deep down, we know that we are all too similar to these characters. We know that we are in desperate need of help, and these stories give us hope.

After King Solomon died, the Kingdom of Israel was divided resulting in two nations instead of one: the Kingdom of Israel to the north and the Kingdom of Judah to the south. King Jehoram was the son of King Jehoshaphat and ruled Judah. Jehoram was a wicked man whose sinfulness ran deep. He led the people of Jerusalem into idolatry and even went on to murder his own brothers. God spoke through the prophet Elijah and told Jehoram that he would suffer from an incurable disease. After suffering for two years, the disease took his life. Sadly, no one even regretted his passing. Jehoram of Judah was an awful king, yet he is listed among the lineage of Jesus, our perfect king. The shortened form of Jehoram's name—Joram—is what is mentioned in the genealogy


DECEMBER 12 cont.

found in Matthew 1. It was this King of Judah that the Gospel of Matthew is referring to.

As wild as this story is, God is intricately woven all throughout it. When Judah was attacked, God made sure that one of the king's sons would be spared. Why? God was faithful to his promise to King David. God would use the lineage of this wicked king to bring about the perfect king that would save men and women like Jehoram. Without God's grace, we, too, would be left in our own rebellion. You and I are no different than Jehoram. However, the miracle of Christmas is that—instead of judgment—God gives us grace! The birth of Jesus means Jehoram's story does not have to be yours. God has not given up on you no matter how broken you may think you may be.

Brothers and sisters, take some time today to identify where in your life you may be in rebellion against God. Like Jehoram, you may be tempted to worship idols or enjoy things more than Jesus. Ask God to help you see victory over that sin.

~ Pastor Hunter

 *Father, thank You for always being faithful to keep Your promises. Thank you for sending Jesus to redeem us despite our sinfulness. Please open my eyes to see sin in my life and equip me to fight it so I can pursue You with all that I am.*



DECEMBER 13

UZZIAH  
ANOTHER CHRISTMAS CAROL

*[Uzziah's] fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.*

2 Chronicles 26:15-16  
*from 2 Chronicles 26:1-22*

One of the most beloved and enduring Christmas stories is Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. The story's main character, Ebenezer Scrooge, is an old miser who dislikes Christmas and has alienated himself from family, friends, and co-workers. The downward trajectory of his life is revealed one Christmas Eve when he is visited by a series of ghosts. He first encounters the Ghost of Christmas Past, who reveals scenes from his earlier days. This introduces us to a young, optimistic Ebenezer who eventually lets his ambitions get in the way of true love. His encounter with the Ghost of Christmas Present depicts Scrooge as a selfish, unconcerned loner with no meaningful relationships. Finally, the Ghost of Christmas Yet-to-Come presents Ebenezer with a glimpse of his possible future, including a neglected tombstone bearing his name. After being confronted with his tragic life, Scrooge is transformed into a gentler, kinder man who embraces the true spirit of Christmas.

There is a real-life *Scrooge* found in the genealogy of Jesus. His name is Uzziah. He wasn't visited by ghosts, but his life followed a similar downward trajectory. Sadly, his tale does not end on a positive note. Like Ebenezer, Uzziah's




DECEMBER 13 cont.

story begins with hope and promise. He became king of Judah at the young age of 16. From the beginning of his reign, he made it his practice to seek the Lord, and *as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper* (v.5). With the Lord's help, he achieved much success and fame as a king (v.15). Unfortunately, ambition and pride overtook him, leading to his downfall. He once entered the Temple to worship but decided to do so on his terms rather than the Lord's. His specific sin was that he burned incense, which was something only the priests were allowed to do (v.16). When the priest confronted him over his prideful disobedience, he acted out in anger instead of responding with repentance. In response, the Lord afflicted him with leprosy (v.19), a highly contagious skin disease that required isolation from others. For the rest of his life, Uzziah was forced to live alone, alienated from family and friends, just like Ebenezer. Uzziah's story also contains a *Scrooge-esque* grave scene along with an epithet that summarizes the tragedy of his life: *He is a leper* (v.22). Unlike Ebenezer, however, Uzziah never experienced a moment of transformation. What a sad ending to a once-promising life.

Uzziah's story provides many lessons, like challenging us to seek the Lord in all things, calling us to trust Him to prosper us, and warning us to avoid prideful disobedience. That Uzziah was included in Jesus' family tree ought to remind us that our future, our success, and our hope should always be in Jesus and not in ourselves.

~ Pastor Darren

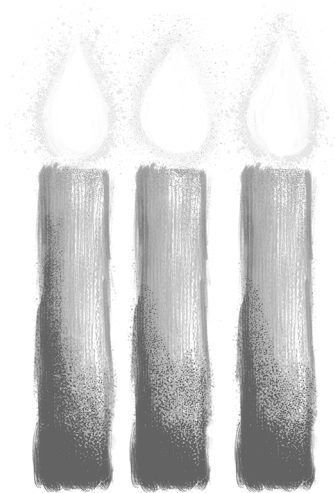


 *Lord, never let me forget that seeking and obeying  
You is to be my greatest ambition. My past, present,  
and future are Yours.*





# WEEK 3



DECEMBER 16

HEZEKIAH  
BREAKING THE PATTERN

*Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and faithful before the Lord his God. And every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God and in accordance with the law and the commandments, seeking his God, he did with all his heart, and prospered.*

2 Chronicles 31:20-21  
*from 2 Chronicles 31:1-21*

King Hezekiah ruled the southern kingdom of Judah about 300 years after King David. Most of the kings who preceded him had done evil. Hezekiah did not look to those evil kings for inspiration. Instead, he looked to God. Hezekiah sought God with all his heart and in the end, he and was found to have done what was good and right and faithful before God.

Coming into leadership after such a long season of evil and disobedience, why would Hezekiah seek God for his inspiration to serve as king? Why would he not simply follow the recent pattern? Hezekiah was different because he had confidence in the promise God made to Abraham – that Abraham's nation would be a great nation that would be a blessing to the world.

So much evil had occurred. The people were so far from God. Disobedience defined them. Idolatry was their passion. Their nation was not currently a blessing to the world. One wonders if there was any hope that things could change.


For more than a century, Obadiah, Joel, Isaiah, and Micah had prophesied, condemning the leaders and the people

for their dishonesty and idolatry. These prophets called the people to follow God with all their hearts, and yet their evil patterns continued. But then, Hezekiah became king. Hezekiah had listened to the prophets, and he believed their words, so his desire was to follow God and honor him. The result was a king who did what was good and right and faithful before the Lord his God.

The prophets had been faithful to watch and wait for a Messiah while they were calling their nation to obedience. Hezekiah was likewise faithful to watch and wait while he faithfully led the nation. Eventually, through this people, God would provide the ultimate blessing to the world when He provided his Son to atone for the sin of mankind – no greater blessing was possible. What we needed most would be given by the God who provides.

During this Advent season, follow the pattern that King Hezekiah established: In the midst of evil, disobedience, and idolatry, do what is good and right and faithful!

~ Pastor Monty

 *Dear Father, though we live in wicked days and among wicked people, lead me to be faithful before You. Show me what is good and right as I seek You with all of my heart.*



DECEMBER 17

MANASSEH  
FROM FAITHLESS TO REPENTANT

*And [Manasseh] did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.*

2 Kings 21:2  
*from 2 Kings 2:1-18*

*And when he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.*

2 Chronicles 33:12  
*from 2 Chronicles 33:1-13*

Leadership transitions can be tricky. One leader can be great, and the next can be a train wreck. We see this in our world all the time. New CEOs take over and change the things we love about the organization. New presidents are sworn in, only to see laws changed and the economy dive. Far too often, leadership changes come with difficulty because of new direction and lack of fidelity to the previous vision. Unfortunately for the Israelites, they lived this reality far too often. Kings would rise to power and live faithful unto God, while the next king would reign faithless before God.

This story of faithlessness describes the reign of King Manasseh. Manasseh's father was King Hezekiah, who is described as doing *what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God*. He purified the southern kingdom of Judea by destroying its pagan altars, idols, and temples. However, when Hezekiah was no longer king, his twelve-year-old son would transition to power

and undo all of Hezekiah's faith-filled leadership. As king, Manasseh did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, leading the nation of Judah in accordance with the customs of the pagan nations the Lord had driven out of their land. He rebuilt the pagan altars that his father had torn down, restored the idols his father had removed, and reestablished the pagan worship that had been forbidden in the temples. His actions in leadership are described as *abominations*, including the shedding of much innocent blood.

While 2 Kings details the wickedness of Manasseh, 2 Chronicles describes his eventual repentance. Amidst his wickedness, the Lord attempted to speak to Manasseh and the people, but no one listened. This kindled God's anger against Manasseh. God caused armies to fall upon the people, and Manasseh was taken. In his distress, he realized his failure. The text says he *humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers*. This action moved God as he heard his plea. God saved Manasseh from the armies, and from this, *Manasseh knew that the LORD was God*. This changed everything for Manasseh and led to great repentance. Turning from his wickedness, he tore down the pagan alters and destroyed the idols. He rebuilt alters to the Lord and reestablished regular sacrifices and offerings to Him. Where idols were once worshipped, God was worshipped. No matter how far it seemed Manasseh had walked away from the Lord, it was never beyond the reach of God's grace.

Christmas is the ultimate picture of God's grace. We did not deserve Christ, yet He still came. He came, making






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a way for our repentance. Just like Manasseh, no matter how far we think we have walked away from the Lord, it is never too far. This Christmas, ask the Lord to illuminate areas of your life that—just like that of Manasseh’s life—may need to be met with repentance.

~ Pastor BJ

 *Father, thank You for pursuing us with Your grace at Christmas. Thank You for the grace of second chances and give me a desire for faithfulness unto You. As You did for Manasseh, help me to see the wicked areas of my heart and fill me with a passion to return to You.*



DECEMBER 18

JOSIAH

## REDISCOVERING A LIFE OF OBEDIENCE

*And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.*

2 Kings 22:2

One of my all-time favorite Christmas movies is *Home Alone*. If you've never seen the movie, do yourself a favor and watch it! It is the story of an 8-year-old boy named Kevin McCallister. On the eve of a family vacation to Paris, with a house full of extended family, Kevin gets into a scuffle with his older brother and creates a scene. His punishment is to be banished to the third floor of the family home for the night. In a moment of anger, Kevin blurts out that he wished he didn't have a family. Kevin unexpectedly gets his wish when the family wakes up late and, in their rush to make it to the airport on time, they forget Kevin on the third floor. Kevin wakes up to a quiet house. The family he wished he didn't have just hours earlier is nowhere to be found. In an instant, Kevin was the man of the house. The ruler of his kingdom!

In Jesus' earthly lineage, one can find another boy who suddenly found himself as ruler of his kingdom. Josiah ruled the region of Judah for thirty-one years. One of the more fascinating aspects of his reign is that he took the throne when he was EIGHT years old. The same age as Kevin McCallister in *Home Alone*. That is the age of a second grader! With this in mind, please take a moment to reread the verse for the day. Josiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. When he assumed leadership, Judah was in trouble and God's judgment was coming. However,

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due to Josiah's incredible leadership, the judgment was delayed. Josiah was a good king who sought the Lord and broke the cycle of ungodly leadership that had become far too common in Judah. Some describe him as a *second Moses*. He led the people of Judah into a time of reformation. Josiah loved the Lord and provided strong spiritual leadership to his people.

There are many lessons we can learn from Josiah, and I'd like for us to ponder a couple of them. First, it is never too early to begin doing what is right in the eyes of the Lord. If you are a young person, what are you waiting for? 1 Timothy 4:12 says, *Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.* I'm confident that our younger generations could use a few people like Josiah to lead the way! Next, regardless of your age, are you pursuing the Lord like Josiah did? If the answer is no, what are you waiting on? The generations that preceded Josiah did not pursue the things of God and, therefore, had lost their way. In many ways, I feel like that is what we are living. We've lost our way. However, it isn't too late! We, too, can be like Josiah if we choose to resist the things of this world and pursue righteous living.

Are you walking with the Lord? If not, turn from your sin and begin pursuing what is right in the eyes of the Lord today!

~ Pastor Danny



 *Father, please give me the courage, conviction, and passion of Josiah to live a life that pursues what is right in Your eyes. Forgive me for where I have failed You. Please give me the strength I need to live a life of godliness. In Jesus' name, Amen!*



DECEMBER 19

**JECHONIAH AND ZERUBBABEL  
A CURSE REMOVED**

*As I live, declares the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet ring on my right hand, yet I would tear you off.*

Jeremiah 22:24  
*from Jeremiah 22:24-30*

*On that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the Lord, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord of hosts.*

Haggai 2:23  
*from Haggai 2:20-23*

Who are Jechoniah and Zerubbabel and what role do they play in the lineage of Jesus? The answers to these questions tell an interesting story of the ancestry of our Savior.

Jechoniah—who is also referred to as Coniah or Jehoiachin—was a very evil king. He was the last king of Judah before the nation was led into captivity in Babylon. He was so evil that God pronounced a curse upon him. God said to him, “If you were a signet ring on my right hand I would pluck you off.” In ancient times, a signet ring was a ring of identity and authority. With his ring, a king could sign and seal important edicts and they would be binding. God declared to Jechoniah that He was going to remove that authority from him. Worse yet, He said of him, *Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah*

(Jeremiah 22:30). As it turned out, Jechoniah was not childless but had seven sons. However, just as the Lord promised, none of his children ruled as king ever again.

Interestingly, the Lord reintroduces the imagery of the signet ring with Zerubbabel, Jechoniah's godly grandson. Through the prophet Haggai, God declared, *On that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the Lord, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord of hosts* (Haggai 2:23). With that declaration, the curse upon Jechoniah and his descendants was removed. Now, how does that impact the lineage of Jesus?

In Matthew's genealogy of Jesus, he traced the lineage to Joseph through Jechoniah and Zerubbabel. Joseph is the legal guardian of Jesus, but he is not the Father of Jesus; God is. In Luke's account, he traces Jesus' lineage through Mary's family tree, and there is no mention of Jechoniah. Mary's lineage comes from David through Nathan, whereas Joseph's lineage comes from David through Solomon.

Jesus' bloodline is traced through Mary and Jechoniah is not mentioned. Only Zerubbabel's name is listed. It is a reminder that the curse had been removed and the blood line was secure.


What is the takeaway for us? Through Jesus, the curse of sin is removed from us. Whether it is the sin of Adam or the sin of Jechoniah or our own sin, Jesus is the answer to



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the sin problem. He is the divine Son of God who came through the Virgin Mary and sacrificed His life for our sins. Praise God, the curse is removed!

~ Pastor Ed

 *Thank You, Father, for the gift of Your Son who takes away the sin of the world. In Him, I have been set free from the curse of sin and am included in the family of God.*



DECEMBER 20

ABIUD, ELIAKIM, AZOR, ZADOK, ACHIM, ELIUD,  
ELEAZAR, MATTHAN

## NOBODIES FOR JESUS

*And Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob*

Matthew 1:13-15

Have you ever felt insignificant in the whole scheme of things? When I was a child, my sister and I would sit out on a blanket and look up at the clear night sky. We would marvel at the moon and stars, watch shooting stars with amazement, and eventually talk about how tiny we were compared to the vast expanse of space. When you think about it, we, as individuals, really are just specks in the sum of existence. Our Father, however, sees us as infinitely more than that.

In our passage today, we read about eleven men, ten of whom we know little to nothing about from the Bible. They may have a few names that sound familiar, but only because they are named after more *famous* people. These eleven men appear at the end of a very long list of names that include the likes of Abraham, Isaac, Jesse, David, and Solomon. You get the picture, don't you? These eleven *nobodies* may seem insignificant but are anything but that in God's grand design. Psalm 33:11 states, *The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.* The word *counsel* can mean advice, plans, or decisions. It was always a part of God's plan to involve these *nobodies* in his redemptive process. You could say that God created all the people in the genealogy of Jesus so




DECEMBER 20 cont.

that the world would have an opportunity to be redeemed and reconciled to the Father, through the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This advent season, if you ever feel insignificant or like you don't matter, consider these *nobodies for Jesus*. You are no less significant than they because—just as the Lord used them to bring about the Advent of our Savior—He can use you to proclaim the Savior to a world that still needs to be reconciled to the Father.

*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!* Yes, even the feet of a bunch of *nobodies* like us.

~ Bruce, serving in the Asia Pacific Rim

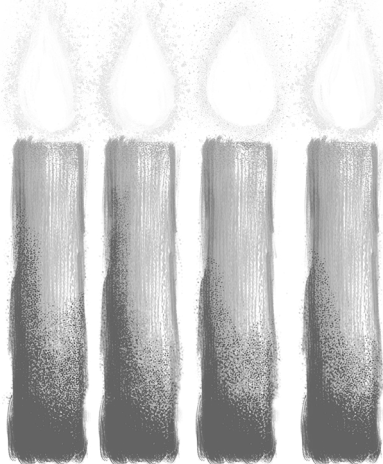
 *Lord, my name may never be listed among the great saints of the past. All I ask is that You use this “nobody” to make Your name known to the world. Amen.*







# WEEK 4



DECEMBER 23

JOSEPH  
AN UNLIKELY HERO

*When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*

Matthew 1:24-25  
*from Matthew 1:18-25*

The genealogy of Jesus contains a Who's Who list of unlikely heroes: ordinary people used of the Lord to be pivotal characters in the unfolding redemption narrative of the Bible. It is no wonder, then, that Joseph appears on that list. Joseph—one of the last to be listed in Jesus' family tree—was remarkably unremarkable. The most interesting thing about him was that he was a craftsman, a carpenter. From all appearances, he intended to do what other men of his day did: make an honest living, establish a family, and live a quiet life. He had no idea when he pledged himself to his fiancé that he would be thrust into the greatest story ever told and that he would be called to display a heroic level of faith.

During his engagement to Mary, Joseph discovered that she was *with child* though they had not been together as a couple. This was devastating to Joseph because pregnancy outside of wedlock in those days was deemed culturally offensive and morally unacceptable. He felt he had no choice but to end his engagement to her. Being a righteous man, he sought to spare Mary the disgrace and shame of a public divorce, which is why he resolved to do so in a quiet way. Unbeknownst to Joseph was that Mary's pregnancy was the result of a miracle on God's part and not by sin


on her part. As Joseph wrestled over what to do, an angel appeared to him in a dream 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. (vv.20-21)*

What would you have done had you been in Joseph's place? No woman in human history had ever conceived a child without a man involved. It is scientifically impossible. So, would you have believed the angel? Joseph believed and immediately obeyed: *He did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. (v.24)* In that moment, Joseph moved from being an ordinary man to being extraordinarily faithful. An unlikely hero emerged!

Joseph's part in the Christmas story is a reminder that God uses ordinary people. If He can use a remarkably unremarkable person like Joseph, He can use you, as well. Your task is to be willing to believe and obey. Perhaps you are an unlikely hero, too.

~ Pastor Darren

 *Lord, Your early genealogy is a testament to how You choose to do extraordinary things through ordinary people who will trust You and obey You. Give me the faith of Joseph so that I can live obediently for You.*



DECEMBER 24

MARY  
FAVOR WITH GOD

*And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus."*

Luke 1:30-31  
*from Luke 1:26-38*

Imagine this scenario: You are a young Jewish girl who is quietly minding her own business when all of a sudden—BOOM!—an angel appears out of nowhere! Now, you might be envisioning some little baby cherub with wings and a bow with heart-tipped arrows, but the Bible describes the appearance of angels in much more imposing ways. Regardless, Mary—the future mother of Jesus—was no doubt afraid when she was visited by the angel we read about in the first chapter of Luke. Moreover, this angel declares to her that she has *found favor with God* and will give birth to the Son of God though she was a virgin. Could you imagine the confusion? Her heart must have raced as she pondered the things being told to her. As there was favor in Mary, there was also faith found in her as she responded, *"I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word"* (Luke 1:38).


This may have seemed like a random occurrence with a random girl in a random place in time. However, the Bible gives the overwhelming indication that this boy to be born to this woman was very calculated and deliberate.

In the storyline of the ancestry of Jesus, we see God's providence woven in and through many generations. It

was the faithful patriarchs who carried the hope of Christ within their lineage. King David was given a kingdom that would last forever and through whom the Christ would come, which He declared in His covenant with David: *And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever* (2 Samuel 7:15-16).

God's favor rested on Mary. This same favor of God is seen throughout the Bible as a supernatural delight in certain individuals or people groups. As is declared in Isaiah 66:2 (NIV), *These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word.* It seems as if Mary feared the Word of the Lord as much as she feared the visiting angel in our story. Because of her favor and the favor of her Son, those who are in Christ inherit favor from God that will last for all eternity. For this, we should be eternally grateful and aware of God's favor in our lives as we reflect today, on the eve of our celebration of Christ's birth!

~ Pastor David

 *Lord, as we patiently await the celebration of Christ's birth, may we remember the favor You have for Your children, for those who are humble and contrite in spirit. May we grow in faith today as we ponder all that You have done for us!*





DECEMBER 25

JESUS  
THE LONG-EXPECTED ONE

*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.*

Luke 2:10-11  
*from Luke 2:8-12*

Merry Christmas!


I hope it was worth the wait. We live in a time of unprecedented haste. When we want something, we want it immediately. We have on-demand streaming, Amazon Prime one-day shipping, instant access to unlimited information on our smartphones, and fast-food drive-thrus. But as the pace of the world increases, have you ever thought about what it is doing to our hearts? Maybe because of our current culture we need to learn how to wait again. Christmas allows us all to slow down and do just that.

For centuries the people of God have been learning lessons on waiting. Think back to the wilderness wanderings and then the Exile. Especially do not forget the years and years between the Old Testament and the New Testament when God was apparently silent. You may even feel as if God is silent now in your life. Are you currently in a season of waiting on the Lord? Are you waiting for Him to do something in your life? Do you wonder where He is or what He is doing while you wait? Do you feel abandoned? I know for me, waiting on Him can feel like being in the wilderness at times.

Here is the good news of great joy which Christmas morning is a reminder of: God's past faithfulness ensures His present and future faithfulness. God kept His promise before, and He can be trusted to keep doing so. Those years of apparent silence ended with the triumphant victory of our King in the form of a baby. He did not come to be served but to serve. He came for a purpose: to end suffering, pain, and sin, and, ultimately, to end death once and for all. Yes, there was waiting, but the battle had already been won. In our waiting, our faith blossoms as we learn to trust Him. In our waiting, brothers and sisters, we find God faithful.

Christian, see your seasons of waiting as opportunities for strengthening your trust in Him. His apparent silence does not mean that He is not there and that He is not working. On this Christmas morning, be reminded that He always follows through on His promises. Seek Him above all else and let your waiting say, "Lord, I trust You."

~ Pastor Hunter

 *Father, I know that You are not silent, and You are not distant. You have given us Your Word and You promise to always be with us to the end of the age. In my waiting teach me to trust You and deepen my faith. Ultimately, lead me to treasure You above any other gift.*





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