



PREPARING FOR
IMMANUEL

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

DAILY READINGS FOR THE SEASON

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel."

Isaiah 7:14

WEEK ONE | PROPHECY - WAITING WITH HOPE

WEEK TWO | BETHLEHEM - AN UNLIKELY PLACE FOR A KING

WEEK THREE | ANGELS - JOY ON DISPLAY

WEEK FOUR | SHEPHERDS - GOD'S UNEXPECTED MESSENGERS



Within the busyness of Christmas, it can be easy to lose the true reason we celebrate. We invite you to set aside time each day and join us as we explore the hope of this season together and celebrate Christ's birth! Our daily readings will focus on the theme of each Advent candle as we consider the people connected to our Savior's birth, and ultimately how His birth impacts us today.

"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace."

Isaiah 9:6

In our first week of Advent, we are lighting the Prophecy candle and focusing on the theme of hope. Starting in Genesis 3, God made a promise to provide a savior for the world. Hundreds of years before the Messiah was born, prophets such as Isaiah foretold his birth and reminded the people of the hope of this promise. We invite you to join us this week as we look at the different prophecies that led up to Christ's birth and what it looks like to wait expectantly with hope.

Day One | 2 Peter 1:20-21

Day Two | Luke 1:5-25

Day Three | Luke 1:14-17

Day Four | Isaiah 9:6-7

Day Five | Genesis 28:1-22 & John 1:43-51

Sunday Passage: Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, since he was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had thought this over, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a Son; and you shall name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Now all this took place so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled: "Behold, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a Son, and they shall name Him Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us." And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he named Him Jesus.

NOVEMBER 29

2 PETER 1:20-21

John Gordon | Executive Pastor

What is something you are excited about that you look forward to and can hardly wait for it to happen? Maybe you look forward to your birthday, or family vacation, or even Christmas! Part of the excitement is in looking forward to those special times.

Did you know that God's Word, the Bible, tells us about some things that were going to take place, even long before they happened? This is what the Bible refers to as 'prophecy,' or foretelling the future. Prophecy is not merely about predicting the future, but it is about telling exactly what is going to happen in the future, even long before it happens!

There are four important truths to learn about prophecy in this passage. First, prophecy is in Scripture, the Bible. Second, prophecy is not something made up by the prophets, those who spoke God's Word from God Himself. Third, it was the Holy Spirit of God who gave the prophets the words to speak and to write. Fourth, the prophets spoke and wrote the very words the Holy Spirit of God gave them.

One of the most exciting prophecies that we celebrate at Christmas is about the birth of Jesus. Long before Jesus was born, God's Holy Spirit gave prophets the words to speak and to write about His birth. Jesus' birth was exactly as the prophets had spoken and written. They looked ahead excitedly to His coming!

Advent is about looking ahead to celebrating Jesus' birth at Christmas. In this Advent season as you look forward to celebrating the birth of Jesus, remember how God through His Holy Spirit gave the words of prophecy to His prophets. Now, that is something to get excited about!

- What do prophets do?
- Why should we be excited about and celebrate Advent?

FAMILY ACTIVITY IDEAS

- As a family, make an Advent Wreath.
- Create a countdown to Christmas where you can mark off the days as you anticipate (hope for) the celebration of Jesus' birth. It can be as simple or as elaborate as you like.

For more directions and ideas, check out our Family Activity Guide at waysidechapel.org/advent

NOVEMBER 30

LUKE 1:5-25

Brenda McCord | Director of Women's Ministries

Words of prophecy concerning the coming Messiah are presented in the Hebrew Scriptures (see Isaiah 53 and Daniel 9:24-26). Then in Malachi 4:5-6, the prophet announces a coming forerunner to the Messiah. The Jewish people waited and watched with great expectation during 400 years of silence. In Jerusalem, people came to the Temple and the priests continued to perform their assigned tasks and duties. Waiting.

The book of Luke introduces us to Zechariah, a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and Elizabeth, his wife, from the priestly line of Aaron. During their years of marriage, they were not able to have children and the Scriptures specifically tell us Elizabeth was not able to conceive a child. She was barren. The text also wants the reader to know this husband and wife are getting older. It doesn't look like they will ever have a child of their own.

Children are a gift from the Lord and this couple bore the shame of not having a child of their own. Imagine Elizabeth's sense of humiliation as she went to the market in her town, or stood in the Court of the Women at the Temple in Jerusalem for prayer. There may have been days when she struggled with a great sorrow and a strong sense of disappointment in the Lord. Elizabeth and her husband had lived godly lives. Why had God not allowed them to conceive and have children?

Elizabeth trusted in her Heavenly Father even in the midst of her disappointment. She kept her eyes on Yahweh even though life seemed to fall short of her hopes and plans. Elizabeth believed God cared for her and she made the mindful choice to continue living a righteous life.

The disappointments of life can sometimes seem overwhelming and they can cause us to stray from righteous living. Each of us can recall situations in our own lives when we wondered if God was paying attention to all the details. We have come to God with pointed questions. Have You forgotten about me, Lord? Do You see my hurt, pain, disappointment, or shame?

We must always remember God is not haphazard. But rather, He is careful. He weaves every detail into His purpose, His perfect plan, according to His sovereign will. The following poem became popular when Corrie ten Boom included it in her book, *The Hiding Place*.

My life is but a weaving between my Lord and me; I cannot choose the colours He worketh steadily. Oft times He weaveth sorrow and I, in foolish pride, forget He sees the upper, and I the underside.

Not till the loom is silent and the shuttles cease to fly, shall God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why. The dark threads are as needful in the Weaver's skillful hand, as the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned.

He knows, He loves, He cares, nothing this truth can dim. He gives His very best to those who leave the choice with Him. (Author Unknown)

- Take some time to name the hurts and disappointments in your life. Jot them down and read them back to God. Bring each one to the Lord and ask Him to help you trust Him for His goodness, plan, and purpose.
- Can I trust His plan, His purpose for my life? When have you experienced doubt or struggled with the sovereignty of God? Ask God to strengthen your resolve to live a righteous life and to trust Him for His purpose and plan.

DECEMBER 1

LUKE 1:14-17

Will Davis | Stone Oak Campus Pastor

Whenever we start seeing the first lights on the trees or the inflatables in people's yards, we know these are signs that Christmas is coming. Advent is a time of great joy for many as we celebrate the birth of Christ but it's also a time of waiting and expectation. Before the first advent, or arrival, of Jesus, the Jewish people were eagerly waiting for the coming of Messiah. And just like the lights in the trees today, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies served as signs and indicators that the Savior, the Light of the world, was coming soon. And the birth of John the Baptist served as one of these signs.

The angel tells Zacharias in Luke 1:14-17 that many would rejoice at John's birth for "he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah...so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

A forerunner was one who would run ahead of a king and his army to announce and prepare the people for his arrival. John's ministry was all about announcing and preparing people for the kingdom of God.

In the final two verses of the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi said: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great day of the Lord comes." Those words would usher in 400 years of biblical silence until the birth of John who came as a prophet in the spirit of Elijah. That's why the priests and Levites approached John and asked him: Who are you? Are you Elijah? What do you say about yourself? And John answered: I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said (John 1:21-23).

John's role in the story of Christmas was to prepare the way of the Lord and to call people to repent and turn their hearts to the coming Messiah, Jesus.

- How can you prepare your heart and turn your focus upon the worship of Christ this Advent season?
- Read John 1:6-8. What do these verses tell us about John the Baptist's ministry?

DECEMBER 2

ISAIAH 9:6-7

Jason Uptmore | Associate Pastor

My wife and I wrestled with infertility for years before the birth of our first child. We yearned deeply for God to grant us our hearts desire. One of the great joys of our life was when we were able to announce the good news of our child's birth. Where we proclaimed with joyful hearts, of how God had heard our prayer! A child is coming!

In one of the most popular Christmas passages, the Prophet Isaiah announced with great joy in Isaiah chapter 9, that a child was coming.

The Prophet Isaiah encourages his readers in the midst of oppression and hardship to take hope, for a child was coming who would make all things right. A child who would be able to do so, because He would be God Himself.

This royal birth announcement declares that the government would rest on this child's shoulders, and this child would bring peace with Him. For that's what God was coming to establish. While mankind deserves God's wrath because of sin, God instead offers us His peace through His Son.

Isaiah's birth announcement included four different names for this baby to come: "His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." Each of these names spoke to things this great baby would accomplish.

'Wonderful Counselor' speaks to the divine wisdom Jesus would possess where He would minister to people's hurting souls. 'Mighty God' indicates that Jesus would be strong and powerful, able to aid those who are weak. 'Everlasting Father' describes Jesus coming as Dad, who would provide for his children for all eternity. 'Prince of Peace' showcases how Jesus would right every wrong and bring complete restoration.

There's never been a greater birth announcement than the one Isaiah gave. That's who Jesus is, and that's what He came to do. Which is why you and I have hope.

- Examine the 4 different names given to Jesus in this passage. How can each of those roles be an encouragement to you right now?
- In what areas of your life are you hoping to gain more peace? How can you better trust in Christ for that peace?
- Who else in your life needs to know about Isaiah's great announcement? Will you pray for them right now? Will you consider giving them the greatest gift possible, by sharing the good news of the gospel with them?

We encourage you to take time to worship and thank God for His faithfulness in fulfilling the prophecies and sending His Son to save us.

You can find a Spotify playlist of songs on our website at waysidechapel.org/advent.

DECEMBER 3

GENESIS 28:1-22 & JOHN 1:43-51

Cameron Contrestano | Pastor of College & Stone Oak Student Ministries

When we meet Jacob in Genesis 28, the text says he's hit rock-bottom, literally! After being forced to flee his home to escape his older brother Esau's wrath, Jacob finds himself with nothing and no one in the middle of nowhere. Apparently, he doesn't even have a spare change of clothes or a coat to use as a pillow so he lays down in the darkness on with his head on a rock. Though God had chosen him as the one to receive and pass on the divine blessing, Jacob must have felt as far from God and from his blessings as possible.

Yet, suddenly Jacob awakes and becomes aware of an enormous structure in front of him. On this structure there are angels, messengers of God, coming and going. At the top of the structure is God himself ruling over the world in majesty and glory.

In this dream Jacob is seeing that even in moments of pain and struggle, God is still sending out his power and influence into the world to carry out his good and perfect will. What's more, God himself promises to be with Jacob as his companion. To Jacob, whose scheming personality alienated him from everyone in his life, this promise must have made his heart burn in joyful relief. But there's a problem... While it is true that God keeps his promise to be with Jacob all his days, there is still distance and separation between them as the dream so plainly illustrates. God is at the top of this impossibly tall structure, and Jacob is at the bottom. How can a sinful, broken man like Jacob truly enjoy God's life-giving presence?

Hundreds of years later a descendant of Jacob named Nathaniel met a young rabbi from Nazareth who claimed to be Israel's Messiah. He was skeptical at first but when Jesus revealed his power to him, Nathaniel worshiped Jesus calling him the "Son of God" and "King of Israel." Jesus responded to him saying...

"Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these. Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Alluding to Jacob's dream, Jesus himself claims to be the structure, the "ladder" that connects God and man. Jesus is the one who assures that God's power, justice, righteousness, mercy, and grace are seen and experienced in the world. And, Jesus is the one who makes it possible for God and man to have a close, intimate relationship!

Jesus Christ left heaven and came to earth – not in heavenly glory – but as a helpless, vulnerable baby. The text tells us Jacob was terrified after he awoke from his vision of God in his heavenly glory. But Jesus came in humility to make a way for us to be with God. Indeed, he was (and is) God with us.

- How has sin isolated & alienated you from God & others?
- What comfort can you experience from God's revelation to Jacob? Is it possible that God is still at work in the difficult and painful circumstances of your life?
- How has Jesus restored your relationship with God? How can you worship him and cherish his sacrifice today?

"But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will come forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His times of coming forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity."

Micah 5:2

This week we are lighting the Bethlehem candle and are reminded that God often chooses the least as the recipients of His love. At the root of God's promise of a savior is His love for us. Without God's love being shown to each of us, Jesus would not have needed to be born and die for our sins. We invite you to join us this week as we ponder what it means to celebrate this season and truly know the love of God.

Day One | Micah 5:2

Day Two | Luke 1:26-55

Day Three | Matthew 1:18-25

Day Four | 1 Samuel 16

Day Five | 1 John 4:7-9

Sunday Passage: Luke 2:1-7

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all the people were on their way to register for the census, each to his own city. Now Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was betrothed to him, and was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

DECEMBER 6

MICAH 5:2

Tim Nowell | Pastor of High School Ministries

Do you ever feel insignificant or too small to matter? I know I tend to get overwhelmed by the specifics of Christmas. The tiny details. The layers and layers of symbolism, prophecy, and answers to questions we didn't even know we had.

What about us? What part could we possibly have in this great big plan? Hundreds of years before the Messiah arrived comes this prophecy about the little town of Bethlehem.

Bethlehem was small and it wasn't important as a town. It was insignificant. But, from Bethlehem would come the ruler of Israel. This wasn't too big of a deal, of course. There had been a ruler from Bethlehem before. King David was from Bethlehem after all.

However, this ruler would not be just another ruler. No, this ruler would be eternal. He had been working and on the move long before His "move" to Bethlehem.

It wasn't just a place the Messiah would eventually visit. It was where He was going to be born. This fact wasn't just accidental either. It was very intentional. It was intentional enough that God foretold of this insignificant town long before the Messiah arrived.

Bethlehem was about something very significant. It was God keeping a promise to David (2 Samuel 7:16). It was God making a promise for the future. It was God keeping a promise for all of us.

From a town with no real significance will come the most significant One.

One can't help but wonder if there is a parallel between Bethlehem and Jesus' statement that the last will be first in the Kingdom of heaven. That principle is all over scripture.

Perhaps it's an indication that nothing is insignificant in God's plan. Every detail matters. In the same way, none of us are insignificant in God's plan. We all matter to Him.

We matter enough that the Messiah, the one from eternity, who has been working since the days of old, was born in insignificant Bethlehem.

- How can Christmas be a reminder that each of us matters to God?



FAMILY ACTIVITY IDEAS

- Register online for our free **Gingerbread Bash** and enjoy a sweet time with your family as you build gingerbread nativities, talk through the Christmas story, and sing Christmas songs. You can even use this great activity as an outreach opportunity for friends and neighbors!

• For more ornament directions, check out our **Family Activity Guide** at waysidechapel.org/advent

DECEMBER 7

LUKE 1:26-55

Belva Stringer | Director of Wayside Kids' Ministries - 410

Mary was a poor, young, unmarried woman. She was given the most unique privilege of being the mother of the Messiah. Gabriel called her favored one, and told her that God was with her. Have you ever given much thought to how God's grace was displayed in her life as the favored one?

It is difficult to even imagine what Mary thought or felt when the angel visited her with the big news. She was going to conceive and bear a son. He would be great and be called the Son of the Most High! In Luke 1:38, Mary says, "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." In essence, Mary said, "Amen, so be it!" Mary's "so be it" response communicated commitment and trust in God, and her willingness to surrender to His plan.

After Mary visited her cousin, Elizabeth, Mary offered soaring praise to God. In Mary's Song (Luke 1:46-55), she magnified the Lord, and acknowledged the great things God had done for her. She expressed her knowledge and experience of God's holiness, mercy, and strength. Mary's amen was a declaration of who God is, and her humble state as His servant.

Mary's path was unknown, but by faith she moved forward. She could not have understood all of what being the mother of the Messiah entailed, but she believed in what God was doing. She knew this pregnancy went against the Jewish marriage laws, and as time passed, it would be obvious she was going to have a baby. How would her family and the people in her village react? Would Joseph abandon her?

Then Mary endured a long donkey ride to Bethlehem in her last month of pregnancy only to find there was no place for her to stay. Finally, she gave birth to her first child in a manger surrounded by animals. Her journey as the mother of the Messiah would consist of blessing and pain, but Mary would continue to live a life of amen, "so be it"! She embraced His Word with unwavering faith believing God always does what He says He will do.

Despite it all, Mary's amen, her "so be it" lifestyle, displayed God's grace as she surrendered, praised God, and kept the faith. She submitted to God's plan not only for her life, but the life of her child and God's ultimate will. Mary humbled herself as she praised God for the great things He had done in her life, and for all the generations to come. Mary's faith took humility and a reverence for God's sovereignty.

God's grace-filled favor, and His presence is promised to all of us, just as it was to Mary. When we understand this, we can hold tightly to amen, "so be it!"

- In what life circumstances are you currently resisting saying, "Amen, so be it" to God?
- What action do you need to take to move from resistance to amen, "so be it"?

DECEMBER 8

MATTHEW 1:18-25

Will Davis | Stone Oak Campus Pastor

At Christmas, so much attention is appropriately given to Jesus and His mother, Mary. But Joseph, and what we know about his life and character, should also be considered during this season.

As a part of Hebrew marriage customs, Mary and Joseph were arranged to be married by their parents. The marriage contract would have been negotiated and once they settled on the terms, the couple would have been considered married even though they were not yet living together. This one-year betrothal period of waiting was to demonstrate the faithfulness of the pledge of purity between the husband and wife-to-be.

Scripture doesn't speak to Joseph's emotions but we can only imagine how the news of Mary's pregnancy would have devastated him. His heart must have been broken. But Joseph still deeply cared for this young woman and out of his genuine love for Mary, this "righteous man" chose not to create a public scandal but to simply divorce her quietly. But in a dream, an angel of the Lord tells Joseph to not be afraid to take Mary as his wife for this unique Child growing in her womb was conceived through the Holy Spirit.

The angel then reveals the gender, the name, and the purpose for this Child's extraordinary life: "She will bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). The angel then tells Joseph that all of this was in keeping with God's eternal plan, for Isaiah had declared 700 years earlier that the virgin will be with Child and her Son would be Immanuel...God with us.

When Joseph wakes up, that burden of rejection and shame is lifted. He is now filled with peace because of this divine intervention, and he displays an attitude of obedience to the Lord's command by taking Mary into his home to care and provide for her. No doubt, there would have been misunderstanding in their community and gossip around the well. But from what we know about Joseph, a man of integrity, he wouldn't have been bothered by the rumors. For Joseph knew the truth of his wife's supernatural pregnancy and God's will for his life.

- How does Joseph once again obey the command of the angel in Matthew 2:13-15?
- Jesus was the perfect God-Man. But what do you think He would have learned from his earthly father, Joseph?

We encourage you to take time to worship and thank God for showing His love to us through the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem!

You can find a Spotify playlist of songs on our website at [waysidechapel.org/advent](https://www.waysidechapel.org/advent).

DECEMBER 9

1 SAMUEL 16:1-13

Ronald Long | Pastor of Middle School Ministries

When Samuel went to Bethlehem, he was mourning the loss of a king. This king had sinned and run from God, so God was going to replace him. Fearful that the current king would seek to do Samuel harm, he took a sacrifice to cover up his real purpose: to anoint a new king over Israel.

David was not one who looked like a king. He was the youngest of his family. He wasn't even brought as a potential candidate when Samuel asked Jesse to bring out all of his sons. He was left to tend the sheep in the fields.

But God had a plan to use the least to lead. He had planned to use the youngest to be king over all of Israel. And God, through David, united a country and established a kingdom with a king who had a heart like His.

So when God brought Jesus from Bethlehem, he was again using the least to lead the many. The poorest to lead the richest. And instead of bringing a sacrifice to Bethlehem, God would bring our sacrifice from Bethlehem.

- When has someone else's sin pointed you back towards God?
- What sacrifice can you make to be nearer to God?

DECEMBER 10

1 JOHN 4:7-9

Stephen Lay | Pastor of Men's Ministries, Connect & Leadership Development

In his gospel, the apostle John describes himself six times as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." It's interesting that John didn't describe himself as "the disciple who loved Jesus." From the moment Jesus invited James and John to "follow Him" and gave them the nickname "sons of thunder," Jesus loved. When Peter, James and John were unable to stay awake in the garden, Jesus loved. And when James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans, Jesus loved.

John knew this love, in spite of his failures. He had felt it, experienced it, and learned from it. The thunderous fiery demeanor was tempered by love, the love of Jesus. It is because of love that John would become known as "The Apostle of Love." Jesus came at His first Advent because of love, so that we could also say that we too are "disciples whom Jesus loves. We love Him, because He first loved us" 1 John 4:19. Let us live in the love of Christ!

- John's nickname changed from the "sons of thunder" to the "apostle of love." What does John's name change indicate about His experience with Jesus?
- When you think of Jesus do you think of "your love for Him," or "His love for you?" How does your perspective change about your failures when you think of your love/His love?

What have been your takeaways as you've pondered Bethlehem and the love of God?
We'd love to hear what God has shown you!

Tag us on our social channels @waysidechapelsa
and use #waysideadvent

*"How delightful on the mountains
Are the feet of one who brings good news,
Who announces peace
And brings good news of happiness,
Who announces salvation,
And says to Zion, "Your God reigns!""*

Isaiah 52:7

This week, we are lighting the Angel candle and focusing on the message of joy that was proclaimed by the angels as they announced the arrival of the Messiah. Through Christ we can have peace with God; and through His work in our lives, we can live at peace with others. We invite you to consider with us what it means to take time and celebrate with the choir of angels who proclaimed Christ's birth: "Glory to God in the highest."

Day One | Joshua 2

Day Two | Luke 1:5-24

Day Three | Matthew 1:20-25

Day Four | Luke 2:13-14

Day Five | Acts 1:9-11

Sunday Passage: Luke 2:8-14

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock at night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood near them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. And so the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army of angels praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among people with whom
He is pleased."

DECEMBER 13

JOSHUA 2

Ronald Long | Pastor of Middle School Ministries

When the angels showed up in the New Testament, most people who saw them were afraid. When the messengers from Joshua came into Jericho, they met people who were afraid too. They had heard all that God had been doing in the lives of Israel. Then the messengers met Rahab. She was afraid, but she still took in the spies and hid them from the king and his soldiers.

Then they made a promise to each other. That if Rahab didn't tell the king who they were or where they had gone, that when Israel invaded Jericho, Rahab and everyone in her house would be spared. She need only to tie a scarlet cord to her window to seal the promise.

How fitting that Rahab would be in the lineage of Jesus. That Angels would come and share the promise of someone coming to the land. That this someone would promise deliverance and life to those who would put their faith in Him. And to seal the promise He wouldn't use a scarlet cord, but His own scarlet blood.

- What is a message from God you need to be reminded of this week?
- Who can you share the Good News of the savior with today?
- Why might someone resist hearing the Good News of Jesus?



FAMILY ACTIVITY IDEAS

Make an angel ornament for your tree.

Color the "Names of Jesus" ornaments (link provided in the Family Activity Guide) and hang them on the tree to remind you who Jesus is and how much He loves you.

Create jingle bell sticks and use them to sing joyfully about Jesus as the angel choir did.

For more card directions, check out our Family Activity Guide at waysidechapel.org/advent

DECEMBER 14

LUKE 1:5-24

Michelle Jenkins | Director of Kids' Ministries - Stone Oak

Imagine this with me...You are an old man. You and your wife have served the Lord and obeyed Him for many years. Your wife was unable to conceive, so you prayed for children, but none came. How disappointing. Then, one day, as you are routinely doing your job, you are chosen for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. How exciting! While you are carefully performing this important task, an angel appears. How terrifying! Not only does the angel appear to you, but he speaks to you and says, "You know that child you prayed for? He's coming! And not only will he be a joy and delight for you and your wife, many will rejoice in his birth. He will be special. He will prepare the world for the coming of the Lord." How amazing! But also, how confusing! You think (and you ask the angel), "How is this possible? I am an old man, and my wife is old, too." Then because you don't believe the message from God the angel has brought, you are struck mute.

This is Zechariah. The angel Gabriel has told him that his prayers have been heard, and he and Elizabeth will finally have a son. And as if that was not enough, this long awaited son will prepare the way for the Lord. What an honor! But because he did not believe, he can't easily share the news with anyone, not even his wife.

Speaking of his wife, imagine Elizabeth's surprise when her husband returns home unable to speak. How shocking! And even more shocking, she, an old woman, becomes pregnant just as the angel told Zechariah. Her response: "The Lord has done this for me."

Zechariah and Elizabeth both loved God and obeyed Him. They both followed God and served Him. They both prayed for a baby. Yet, when the angel brought God's surprising answer, Zechariah doubted God's word while Elizabeth recognized God's power.

Sometimes God's plan for us unfolds in ways that don't make sense, leaving us feeling unsettled, incredulous, and even skeptical. These times give us the opportunity to trust God for who we know Him to be and to see Him work in miraculous ways.

- How do you respond when God's plan for your life is startling and unanticipated?
- Make a list of what you know about God to keep you grounded when the unexpected happens. When we feel shocked and disbelieving as Zechariah initially did, I pray that as we focus on God and His character, we will be able to say with Elizabeth, "thus the Lord has done for me" (Luke 1:25, ESV).

DECEMBER 15

MATTHEW 1:20-25

John Gordon | Executive Pastor

What is something invisible that you cannot see, but you know it exists? Some things that may come to mind might include air, gravity, or wind. Even though you cannot see them, you know they exist because you experience their effects on both your body and on things around you. You may not always be aware of their effects, but you know they exist.

The Bible tells us about invisible spirit beings. Though we cannot see them, we can know they do exist. Angels are spirit beings created by God, with spiritual bodies that neither reproduce nor die. They inhabit the invisible spiritual world. "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him." (Col. 1:16)

Over half of the 66 books in the Bible either mention or refer to the existence of angels—Old Testament 108 times, New Testament 260 times. The Hebrew word malak (Old Testament) and the Greek word angelos (New Testament) are both similar in meaning of messenger angel. Both convey the idea of someone sent over a long distance by an individual, in order to communicate an important message to a recipient. We see this idea in Hebrews 1:14, where angels are referred to as "ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation."

Joseph, while engaged to Mary, received an important message from an angel. Joseph received the message from an angel of the Lord in his dream. He accepted the message as the word of the Lord to him and did as the angel commanded him to do.

This Christmas, consider how you might do the same as you receive the message of the Lord through His word the Bible that Jesus is "God with us" and "He will save His people from their sins."

- What did the prophet Isaiah say would happen in his prophecy? (Isaiah 7:14)
- What message did the angel give to Joseph in his dream? (Matthew 1:20-21)
- What did Joseph do in response to the message the angel gave him in his dream? (Matthew 1:24-25)

REFLECTING ON JOY

As we continue to ponder the theme of joy brought to us in this season, we encourage you to take time to worship and celebrate with the angels who shared the good news of Christ's birth with the world.

You can find a Spotify playlist of songs on our website at [waysidechapel.org/advent](https://www.waysidechapel.org/advent).

DECEMBER 16

LUKE 2:13-14

Tim Nowell | Pastor of High School Ministries

We all know the phrase - we've heard it so many times we can probably repeat it without thinking about it. My children had it memorized when they were very young. I'm sure if we try hard enough, we can even hear Linus saying the words.

There are a number of angelic appearances in scripture, but there's not a long list of times when a multitude showed up. These heralds delivered a very important message that life-changing night: God had delivered His Son who would make peace. His favor, because of Jesus, would rest on all of mankind. For this, God deserves all of the glory.

We tend to think of Christmas as being about us and in a very real sense, it is. Without our Savior, we would have nothing. Without Him, we have death. With Him, through faith, we have life; we have purpose and a relationship with our heavenly Father. Christmas is indeed about God's rescue plan for sinful man. It is not, however, all or only about us.

Christmas is about something else as well. Christmas is about the goodness of God. It's about how He loves us when we don't deserve it. It's about how He has placed His favor on us in a very real and tangible way. He took on flesh and walked among us. In a sense, His favor literally rested on us.

Christmas is about the peace that would come when the Messiah's perfect sacrifice restored our relationship with a holy God. It's about the peace that would come between each of us, knowing that in Christ there is forgiveness, even for each other.

The angels reminded us where all of the attention for this goes: God. Because of Christmas, because of what Christ has done, we can be at peace with each other and with Him.

Christmas is also about worshipping God for the great work He did. Yes, it was for us, but it was also ultimately for His glory.

So while we have it memorized, maybe we should spend some time directing the glory where it truly belongs just like the angels did.

- Do you struggle to take time to be at peace, especially during this season?
- How can we take peace with God through Christ more seriously and keep it from being stale?

DECEMBER 17

ACTS 1:9-11

Jason Uptmore | Associate Pastor

During advent, we are intentionally positioning our hearts to remember the birth of Jesus, to remember His coming, His arrival to this earth. And as we remember what God has done in the past, we joyfully anticipate what He is going to do in the future. That's what this Christmas season is supposed to be all about - joyfully remembering His appearing, and joyfully anticipating His coming. Christ has come, and He will come again. That's the message of Christmas.

And that's what the Angels proclaim in Acts 1:9-11 right after Jesus ascends back into heaven. To sum it up, they shout at all the disciples who were staring at the skies after Jesus left, and they say, 'What are you looking for? Jesus is going to come back in the same way He left! As Christians, that's our hope, and that's also our message to the world. Christ has come and He's coming again! We are called to testify and proclaim that good news to the world.

A few verses earlier, before Jesus ascended back into heaven, Jesus said these words to His followers in Acts 1:8: 'you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.'

It's interesting in Acts 1:8, Jesus says YOU ARE MY WITNESSES. He says witnesses, not teachers, not biblical scholars, not perfect people. A witness is someone who has experienced something happen, and they testify to that fact. A witness doesn't make something true or not, they just bring credibility and weight to whatever is true.

That's all we are called to do. As a believer in Christ, just share what Christ has done for you. Be a faithful witness. May we do just that this Christmas season. May we boldly proclaim the central message of the Christmas season, Christ has come and He's coming again!

- What are you most looking forward to when Christ comes back?
- How can you better witness for Christ's sake? What does that look like in a practical sense?
- Who can you intentionally witness to? When will you do so?
- How can you encourage other Christians to be faithful witnesses?

What have been your takeaways as you've pondered the theme of joy and the message of the angels throughout scripture? We'd love to hear what God has shown you!

Tag us on our social channels (Facebook & Instagram) @waysidechapelsa and use #waysideadvent

"But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God."

1 Corinthians 1:27-29

This week, we are lighting the Shepherd's Candle and considering those in scripture and within the Christmas story who were unexpected messengers. God chose those who society deemed as outcasts to be the first recipients of the news of Christ's birth. As we have taken time this Advent to remember God's faithfulness, our final candle reminds us that the response to all that this season holds is for us to share the good news with others, just as the shepherds did long ago.

Day One | John 4:1-42

Day Two | Isaiah 40:9-11 & John 10:14-15

Day Three | Luke 2:15-20

Day Four | Luke 2:25-35

Christmas Eve | waysidechapel.org/christmas

Sunday Passage: Luke 2:15-20

"When the angels had departed from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let's go straight to Bethlehem, then, and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen Him, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it were amazed about the things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them."



DECEMBER 20

JOHN 4:1-30 & 39-42

Michelle Jenkins | Director of Kids' Ministries - Stone Oak

The woman from Samaria went to draw water from the well at a time when no one else would be there. She was different from the other women. She was a woman with a questionable reputation. She didn't fit in. Imagine her surprise when she saw a man sitting near the well, and her shock when he spoke to her. Not only was she a woman with a controversial past, she was also a Samaritan, and Jews and Samaritans don't mix. But none of that mattered to Jesus. He knew her and He loved her and He desired to have a relationship with her.

As Jesus spoke to her, she listened and asked questions. Instead of feeling ashamed that Jesus knew of her past, she was excited. So excited in fact that she left her water jug by the well as she ran back to the city to tell others about Jesus! "Come and see this man. He KNOWS me! Is He the Christ?" Many went to see Jesus because of the woman's testimony. Once they heard Jesus, they knew for themselves that He is the Savior.

Many times, we feel we aren't qualified to tell people about Jesus. We have no authority, no education. Maybe we have a shady past. Who will believe us? And the shepherds whom the angels proclaimed the news of Christ's birth may have felt the same way. Throughout scripture we see where God purposely chooses to use those whom the world would label as outcasts as His messengers.

All we need is a personal relationship with Jesus. Like the woman from Samaria, we can say, "Come and see this man who knows all about me! He is the Christ!" When we are willing to share our personal stories of how Jesus has transformed us, we give others the opportunity to experience the life-changing joy found only in Jesus.

- How has Jesus changed your life?
- Whom can you tell?

FAMILY ACTIVITY IDEAS

Use a candy cane to tell your child and others about Jesus.

As a family, go caroling in your neighborhood. Knock on doors and when someone answers sing songs that share the joy of Jesus' birth.

Make a J ornament to remember the joy we have in Jesus. Use pipe cleaner with beads, dough, or construction paper to make your J.

For more ideas, check out our Family Activity Guide at waysidechapel.org/advent

DECEMBER 21

JOHN 4:1-30 & 39-42

Stephen Lay | Pastor of Men's Ministry, Connect, & Leadership Development

One of the most endearing captions of Jesus is that of Jesus as "The Good Shepherd." Many years before Jesus was born, Isaiah wrote of a powerful Messiah who would personally bring good news to Jerusalem. This Messiah would come with the comforting combination of a powerful ruler and a tender shepherd.

"See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young." Isaiah 40:10-11

Some seven hundred years later Isaiah's prediction and promise of a coming shepherd would find its ultimate expression and fulfillment in Jesus:

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep." John 10:14-15

The message of comfort offered to Israel through the prophet Isaiah consisted of the ideal ruler who would come to save His people. The same comfort Israel looked forward to in the Messiah is offered to each one of us as we look back at how Jesus laid down His life for us, His sheep.

- Do you picture Jesus as a powerful ruler or a tender shepherd? Which do you identify with the most?
- God is described as one who "comforts His people" in Isaiah 40 and "the God of all comfort" in 2 Corinthians 1:3. How does the first coming of Jesus comfort you? How does looking forward to the second coming of Jesus comfort you?

What have been your takeaways from this Advent? We'd love to hear what God has shown you through this devotional!

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DECEMBER 22

LUKE 2:15-20

Brenda McCord | Director of Women's Ministries

The most common scripture read at the Christmas Eve service is Luke 2:1-20. We have probably all watched Charlie Brown's Christmas and listened to Linus quote these amazing Bible verses filled with the announcement of Good News to the shepherds!

Today, let's pull back the curtain and take a closer look at Mary. This young virgin woman is beginning to feel the pangs of labor and childbirth. When Joseph is unable to find lodging for them at the inn in Bethlehem, he finds shelter in a nearby animal stable. Mary is young and she does not have a midwife, sisters, mother, or cousins to assist her with the delivery of her first-born son. She must depend on Joseph to help her through these hours of labor and birth. No doubt they had discussed the baby's arrival as they traveled the long road from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Joseph assured his espoused wife that he would stay by her side. Certainly, they had prayed together and asked the Lord to see the young mother and this precious baby boy safely through delivery.

Scripture tells us Mary brought forth her firstborn son and wrapped him in strips of cloth - swaddling clothes - and she gently placed this infant in a stone feeding trough. What thoughts and emotions were flooding her mind? Certainly, she replayed the words of Gabriel on the day he came to speak with her, just nine months ago.

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 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; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end. (Luke 1:30-34)

And as Mary and Joseph sat in the animal stable, gazing with wonder and awe at this newborn sleeping in the manger, they heard motion and rustling feet outside the entrance. Perhaps even a voice called out to see if there were any people inside because the shepherds were looking for a specific sign. A group of scruffy, dirty shepherds walked into the delivery room of the Savior, Christ the Lord. Their faces beaming and with excited voices they told Mary and Joseph about the angel's message and the angelic praise choir.

An angel had met with her in Nazareth - a young virgin chosen by the Almighty Father to bear a son, Jesus. Now, shepherds share that an angel and the heavenly host had come to announce the birth of a Savior, Christ the Lord. Only God could orchestrate each minute detail of this miraculous story. Yes, Mary treasured all these words in her heart. While she did not understand or realize everything that would transpire in the coming years, we do know she thought deeply about all she had heard, seen, and experienced. Mary trusted God and was a humble and faithful servant of the Lord.

- Consider Mary's emotions and thoughts as shepherds (complete strangers) walked into the stable where she and Joseph were gazing at this perfect baby boy.
- Take some time to meditate on Luke 2:19 - "But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart." Also, consider the verses from Luke 1:30-34.
- Listen to the song, "[Mary, Did You Know?](#)" Use this as a time to praise and worship Jesus.

DECEMBER 23

LUKE 2:25-35

Cameron Contrestano | Pastor of College & Stone Oak Student Ministries

Her weary body still recovering from the trauma she'd endured, Mary carried her newborn child to the Temple. As devout Jews, she and her husband, Joseph, had come to Jerusalem in obedience to the Law of Moses. On this day, the child would receive the sign of the circumcision which identified him with his kin, the children of Abraham, and his parents would offer sacrifices for purification.

It was also customary on this occasion that the child should officially receive his name. When asked what the child would be called, his father Joseph, answered in obedience to the divine word spoken to him in a dream saying, "His name shall be called 'Jesus,'" which means "God is salvation."

"Jesus" was not an uncommon name at this time. It is after all a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name "Joshua," the great military commander of the people when they entered the Promised Land. In these days when the Romans ruled Judea with an iron fist many Jews were anxiously awaiting another powerful leader to fight for them. In fact, some were even convinced that a Messiah was surely coming. Between their raids on Roman encampments, groups of Israelite resistance fighters were secretly spreading the news that God was on the move, and that he would soon appear to empower them to overthrow their oppressors. To those who were awaiting a military commander, Jesus, the son of Mary and Joseph was a disappointment. They were looking for a different kingdom altogether.

And yet, in this same chapter Luke shows us two individuals who met God's true Messiah because they knew where to look. When Jesus' parents carried him into the temple that day, Simeon and Anna were there waiting for him. The text says that Simeon was "waiting for the consolation (comfort) of Israel," and that Anna "did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day."

While many were waiting for God to set up a kingdom on human terms, Simeon and Anna beheld the true nature of God's kingdom when they saw his Messiah. As Mary and Joseph entered the temple, the Holy Spirit opened their eyes to see a helpless baby boy. Israel's true savior would not come as a military commander. God's Messiah did not come in violence to exercise coercive power. No, he came in humility as the child of lowly parents. Indeed, their offering of "a pair of turtledoves" was appointed in the law for the poorest of the poor. While their eyes had been opened to the truth about the little baby named Jesus, their minds must have filled with awe as they wondered: What does it mean that God's Messiah came as a poor, vulnerable baby?

Even though many were hoping God would one day send a rescuer, few recognized him when he came because he wasn't the kind of savior they expected—or wanted. Simeon and Anna represent those who patiently wait on the Lord to comfort and to save his people according to his glorious purpose. To them, the poor son of a carpenter was not a disappointment, for Simeon worshipped God saying, "My eyes have seen your salvation... for the glory of your people Israel."

God's savior did not come to rule over them but to live with them. One day, he would also die for them. His birth was good news to the poor, the outcast, the sinner, to those who understood their desperate need for a savior... and to those who waited for him with eager expectation.

- As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, consider this: What does it mean that God's Messiah came as a poor, vulnerable baby?
- If God's power for salvation is revealed in Christ's humility, then what does that mean for those who trust in him?
- Are you trusting in Jesus to save you from your sins? Or, are you trusting in Jesus to help you save yourself?



We hope this devotional has allowed you to connect more deeply with the beauty and joy of this season as we have reflected on the Christmas story.

We invite you to join us Christmas Eve!

Visit us at waysidechapel.org/christmas to see service times