

ADVENT

REDISCOVER THE
MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

devotion

Anticipation is building. Plans are being made. The sounds of Nat King Cole and Pentatonix will soon consume your playlists with familiar tunes. The living room will be filled with that beautiful glow as the tall pine is filled with colorful lights.

Kids will laugh. Ugly sweaters will be worn and Starbucks will serve their seasonal Peppermint Mocha. Yes, Christmas is coming.

The word 'Advent' means 'arrival.' For centuries, the Advent Season has been about anticipation, expectation and longing. Yes, there are things we long for and anticipate this season. But the gifts, lights, sounds and sugary smells only last a moment. We are made for more - and so was Christmas.

What are you longing for this Christmas season?

Take time to consider this question. What am I longing for? What is it that fills your imagination with expectation?

Why Wait?

Our calendars are dominated by the tasks and swift currents of consumerism. Swift, as in fast. We hate waiting. Comcast boasts faster speeds, credit cards free us from waiting on a paycheck to make our purchases, and Christmas trees fill the aisles the day after Halloween. The retailers know we don't want to wait. But waiting is a necessary ingredient of life-giving and lasting joy.

Our hurry numbs us from the hunger within. Our souls cry out for more than what store fronts and consumer Christianity can provide.

It is our hope that God will use this devotion to cause the Advent to intrude on your life. We said it, 'intrude.' We want the announcement of Jesus to invade, pushing through the clutter and linking your heart to the ancient prophets who longed for a promised messiah. We want to see you caught up in the story of God and awakened to the longings that are drowned out by the glitz, glamour and long lines of Christmas.

May God strengthen your faith as you journey through
the *Advent* towards our coming King.

- Trent Chambers

How to Use This Guide

Advent is a four week journey towards the good news of Christmas. Each week you will find several short **devotions** from Matthew's gospel. These devotions are designed to help you explore the Scripture and feel the anticipation and joy of Christ's coming.

We believe Advent provides an opportunity to gather the family around God's word more easily. You will find a short **family devotion** each week that highlight a traditional Christmas passage along with a **family activity** that will help strengthen relationships in the home.

Advent invites us into a deeper walk with Christ. Yes, it is about the longing - but we long for God with the assurance that He meets us and satisfies the deep hunger within. Each week, you will find a one page **prayer and fasting** guide. We hope that prioritizing a weekly rhythm of prayer and fasting will shape the way you practice your faith throughout the year.

THY *Kingdom* COME

The Kingdom of God is the rule of God made visible. One day, the Kingdom will be fully realized as the broken areas of this world are made new in the beauty and glory of King Jesus.

We see the need for the Kingdom all around us and experience a longing for Christ every day. As we wait, we carry the Kingdom everywhere we go. The Kingdom of God is the rule of Christ in our hearts and it is being made visible through our lives.

“To live in the Kingdom of God is to see that Jesus is our good King and all of His mandates are for our joy.”

- Daniel Montgomery

Q. We look around our world and know that things are not the way they are meant to be. This knowledge finds its way into our homes. Take time to think about your life. Write down the areas of your life that you feel are 'not the way they are meant to be.'

Q. What do you want to see God do in your life during this season of Advent?

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ,
the son of David, the son of Abraham.

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And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, ⁸and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, ⁹and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, ¹¹and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

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and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

Weeks ago, I sat in line at Chick-fil-a . . . starving. Every thought and every impulse collided on chicken. Normally, Chick-fil-a is quick but on this particular day the line wasn't moving. As the minutes ticked on, my hunger pains were overcome by frustration. "Come on," I said - to no one but me - as I tapped the steering wheel and started shuffling my feet. After what felt like an hour (probably 2.5 minutes), I put the car in reverse, made my way out of the line and spent another 20 minutes driving to another restaurant, getting in another line where I waited all over again. Yep, I did that. I traded 20 minutes so that I wouldn't have to sit in the same line for an extra 5. Patience might be dead.

Lets face it, we hate waiting. Perhaps you even struggled to finish reading those 17 verses. Who are those people anyway? Why on earth would Matthew start his gospel (literally, "good news") with a chapter long family tree? These are all good questions. One of the answers, believe it or not, deals with waiting. God's people have been waiting . . . for a long time.

There are 4 movements in the genealogy that you read.

v.17 . . . from Abraham to David . . . and from David to the deportation to Babylon . . . and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ.

Abraham was the Father of the People of Israel. He was also the recipient of a **promise**.

Q. What does it mean to you that our God is a God who makes promises?

"The Lord said to Abram . . . I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great . . . and all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen.12:2-3)

Every family? The whole world? Since the garden, every person, indeed, all of creation has been waiting. Waiting for the promised child who would crush the head of the serpent and restore God's people. (Gen. 3:15)

God's promise to the world would be fulfilled through a descendent of Abraham. Somewhere, at sometime, one of His children would bless a world that is waiting.

Q. Waiting on God. How do you resonate with God's people at the start of Matthew?

Q. Is there anything that you are waiting on God to do? What is it? How does the truth of God's faithfulness encourage you?

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Our GA weather has been so fickle this fall. Summer one day, winter the next. At the start of October, I was so excited that fall was here. I cleaned off the patio, started building the fire pit and

then the 90 degree temperatures returned. The only thing worse than waiting is thinking that the wait is over - when its not.

King David introduces the second movement of the genealogy. 1 Samuel 8 records a devastating exchange between the people of God and the prophet Samuel. After the mighty miracles that God performed and the vast provision He poured out, His people rejected God's rule and sought a king from among themselves.

God warned them. A human king would enslave them, take their lands, their wealth and the fruit of their harvest and would store it up for Himself. Even so, out of a desire to be like every other nation, they gladly gave themselves away to a corrupt king.

David was a glimmer of light in the darkness. He was a 'man after God's own heart.' (1 Sam. 13:14) The people rejected God. But God did not reject His people. He gave them David. And He gave David a promise.

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land . . . And this is the name by which he will be called, 'The Lord is our righteousness.' (Jer. 23:5-6)

David was a good king, mostly. But He was not the one the world was waiting for. Through Abraham's family, in the line of David, a righteous man will come. This righteous man will reign. And his rule will last forever (Dan. 7:14). He will lead and care for God's people in the way of God Himself. He will reconcile the people to God and become their righteousness.

Though God's people rejected His rule in favor for human kings, God stays true to His promise. One . . . will . . . come.

- Q.** Reflect back on what we have learned about the Kingship of David. What sticks out to you the most?

The people of God made a huge mistake. They rejected God's rule and put their hope and trust in someone else. They hoped that a human king could lead them to victory, prosperity and happiness.

- Q.** How do you see yourself in Israel's story?

- Q.** How would you have responded to Israel if you were God?

- Q.** What does Matthew's opening chapter teach you about God?

-Prayer-

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Matthew is tracing the promise from Abraham to Jesus. He has a goal in mind - but to get there, he has to deal with one of the most discouraging times in Israel's history. The third movement of the genealogy is the Babylonian Exile. 600 years before Jesus, the line of Kings was broken. Perhaps this wasn't surprising. After all, from the time of Solomon (King David's Son), corruption ruled the Kings of Israel. Sure, there were a few hopeful successors (that Jehoshaphat guy was pretty good). But no one was the promised King that the people were waiting for. Doubt and despair set in for generations. And then the exile. The nations invaded and the people of God were enslaved - a throw back to Egypt. The people lost everything.

True, the exile didn't last forever. The people returned to the land of Israel in 537bc. But the city was in ruins. The people returned to a torn down temple, where the presence of God once dwelled and the promise of God's provision and protection once ruled.

God sent a prophet, Malachi, who urged the people to trust in God and be faithful. This was the last prophet that God would send. Silence fell for 400 years.

The temple was rebuilt and the people gathered. But no Jewish King would take the throne. Persia ruled. Greece ruled. And then the Romans. In 37BC, the Caesar of Rome appointed Herod the Great to be 'King of the Jews.'

It is hard to fathom waiting on something for 100s of years. But I am sure we can all resonate with being hopeful about the future only to have your whole life collapse around you.

- Q.** When was the last time you moved from 'life is great' to 'I can't believe this is happening to me'? What was happening in your life at that time?

- Q.** What was the last discouraging circumstance you found yourself in?

- Q.** How do seasons of discouragement or frustration impact your relationship with God?

- Q.** How does Jesus make a difference in your life when you enter a difficult season?

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Go back through the Scripture and **CIRCLE** all the women in the genealogy.

Matthew includes 5 women in his genealogy. It was extremely uncommon for women to show up in a genealogy in the ancient near east. For most of the ancient world, wealth or status was passed on from the father to the eldest son.

The royal line of David, which is introduced in v.6, also passes from Father to Son. So why include the women? We might skip over a lot of details when we read the opening verses of Matthew, but the original readers would have been shocked at the inclusion of these five women.

Matthew included these women for a reason, and honestly, shock value was part of his intention.

Q. If you were applying for the job of your dreams, what are some of the things that you would include on your resume? *Write them below.*

When it comes to presenting ourselves to others, we put our best foot forward. Our resumes are packed with the best we have to offer. One of the refreshing things about the scripture is that the people in the Bible are presented to us without their makeup on. We don't get them as they wish they were - we get them as they truly are.

Jesus came for the marginalized.

No upstanding Jewish woman would have invited Tamar over for dinner. No respectable Jewish man would have been caught dead in the same room as Rahab. The Christ came from a lineage of marginalized women with tarnished reputations.

Jesus redeems the rejected and brings honor and worth to those devalued by society.

Tamar was forced to masquerade as a prostitute and Rahab was forced into prostitution. Even in our 'porn-as-the-norm' culture, prostitutes are marginalized. In ancient times, prostitutes were destitute. They were forced to sell their bodies to provide basic necessities and had no hope of a better life.

- Q.** What do you learn about the heart of God when you consider that the Holy Spirit directed Matthew to include these women when tracing the promise of God's salvation?

For more study, read about Tamar (Genesis 38), Rahab (Josh.2:1,25), Ruth (Book of Ruth, Deut. 23:3), Bathsheba (2 Sam.11).

Jesus restores the broken and removes shame.

It is interesting that Matthew doesn't identify Bathsheba by name. He mentions her in a way that reminds us that she was a victim of the evil, lustful longings of King David. In doing so, Matthew makes clear that David was not the righteous King that God's people longed for.

Bathsheba, like so many women throughout history, lost everything at the evil whim of corrupt men. Is she left broken, ruined by the evil of this place? No, Our God draws near and redeems.

Through Bathsheba, God brings the promised Savior to restore His people, defeat evil and make all things new again.

God's salvation always shocks us and so will the next few chapters of Matthew's gospel. God's plan surprises all who seek him. Mary is an unwed, teenage girl who is about to be written into history as the one who will bring the Christ child into the world. She will suffer, deliver and cling to the one who will suffer for the world and deliver sinners as He clings to the heart of the Father and completes the work that God has for him.

Jesus is the righteous King we are all waiting for - but He has not come in a way that we expect. The promise of God invades and honors those our world discards.

Q. How does Jesus's family tree encourage you?

**O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel**

**O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny
From depths of Hell Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel**

**O come, Thou Day-Spring
Come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel**

**O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heavenly home
Make safe the way that leads on high
And close the path to misery
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel**

**o come,
o come,
Emmanuel**

Family|devo

Set aside **10 minutes** one night this week to talk about God's promise to rescue His children from sin.

DO | Have one member of the family **Light the 1st Advent Candle.**

DO | Have one member of the family **Read the text out loud.**

Before they left the garden, God whispered a promise to Adam and Eve: "It will not always be so! I will come to rescue you! And when I do, I'm going to do battle against the snake. I'll get rid of the sin and the dark and the sadness you let in here. I'm coming back for you!" And he would. One day, God himself would come. **THE JESUS STORY BOOK BIBLE**

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. **ISAIAH 9:6**

Discuss It. Briefly talk about what it means to be rescued from something. Ask your child, "When might you need to be saved from danger? Who would you call upon to rescue you? What are rescuers (or heroes) typically like?"

Have someone read the commentary below.

In the very beginning, God created a perfect world. There was no pain, sickness, death or sadness. God created Adam and Eve to live in His perfect world with joy and peace. But Adam and Eve sinned. They disobeyed God. When they sinned, God's perfect world broke.

There was a punishment for Adam and Eve's sin. Because God is perfect, He cannot be near sin. So Adam and Eve were separated from God.

Ask: Because Adam and Eve disobeyed God, each of us needs to be rescued from something. What do we need rescue from?

Before Adam and Eve left God's perfect Garden, God made a promise. God promised to send a Rescuer, someone to save Adam, Eve and mankind from the punishment of sin. He promised to send Jesus!

God did not send Jesus right away. In fact, it would be 1,000s of years before Jesus would come. God's people waited a long time. while God's people waited thousands of years for the Savior.

Ask: Do you think it is hard to wait? Can you remember a time you had to wait and had a difficult time waiting patiently? What was that like?

Some days, God's children waited patiently. Some days, it was hard. Some days, they wondered if God had forgotten His promise. But God continued to tell them about Jesus.

Pray Together:

(say) Jesus came to earth 2,000 years ago and invites us to trust in Him and to enter a relationship with God. **(ask)** Ask one family member to say a prayer to thank God for sending Jesus to rescue us from our sins.

Family|activity

Lighting of the Tree | Christmas Jubilee.

Consider attending the Christmas Jubilee Event.

SATURDAY DEC. 2

Downtown Woodstock, The Park at City Center

-Schedule-

A Christmas Carol.....2:00pm *free showing at Elm Street*

3K Egg Nog Jog.....3:00pm

Christmas Parade.....5:30pm

Festival in the Park....*Immediately after the Parade*

- Inflatables and Food
- Santa
- Lighting of the Tree

Fasting | The goal of fasting is to awaken our hearts to the hunger pains of the soul that can only be satisfied by God.

Quiet the Noise : Whether its entertainment, social media or a meal, choose to forgo one thing today to create space for prayer.

Fasting Focus : *Meditate* on Isaiah 9:1-7. Take time to consider the names given to the promised Rescuer of God and why those names are relevant today. *tip: write the names down on this page.*

Throughout your fast, devote time to *Prayer*, moving intentionally through various types of prayer:

Gratitude | Thank God for the ways that Jesus fulfills the names given to Him.

Confession | Ask God to reveal areas of sin and unbelief and the faith to confess and receive His forgiveness.

Intercession | Write down the names of the people in your home, next door and/or at your place of work. Pray for each person, acknowledging their need for the Prince of Peace and seeking to understand how God desires to use you in ministering to them.

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “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. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

The Christmas story. It is probably the most familiar story you have ever heard. From little moss covered manger scenes, to familiar songs, the story is so familiar that we are no longer shocked by the baby Jesus. To the original readers of this text, this story was scandalous.

The Scripture tells us that Joseph planned to ‘quietly’ divorce Mary. From the beginning, Christ’s life was riveted with scandal.

The Fear of Disrupted Plans and a Scandalous Pregnancy

- (1) A divorced woman wore a cloak of shame in first century Israel. Mary would not have been lawfully allowed to get remarried after the divorce. Because wealth passes from father to son, she would have little to no hope for a better life.
- (2) It was kindness that motivated Joseph to divorce her 'quietly.' Had Joseph drawn attention to the fact that Mary was pregnant prior to her marriage with Joseph, Mary would have been branded as an adulterer, dragged out into streets and stoned to death by her neighbors. Starting to get a glimpse of the shock surrounding Christmas?

We are so familiar with this story that its shock value is lost on us. Imagine if you were Mary. The date is set. Plans are in place and then you wake up one morning and there is a baby growing inside of you. Seriously. How would you deal?

- Q.** In what way do you imagine fear was present in Mary as she contemplated the change of plans and the conversations she would have to have?
- Q.** None of us can relate to a miraculous conception. We can, however, relate to surprises and disrupted plans. When was the last time God radically changed or halted your plans?

Q. How do you typically respond when your plans get disrupted?

Look up Luke 1:26-56, to read Mary's side of the story, her response and the importance of godly friends.

Q. As we journey towards Christmas, is God currently changing any of your plans? Which ones?

Q. What does it look like to surrender your plans to God in this season?

-Prayer-

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The Lord has spoken. The promise of God is woven into the fabric of history, traced from Genesis to Matthew. Through the prophet Isaiah, we learn the stunning detail that the promised King would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14). Stunning as it is, this claim pales in comparison to the one made here. The promised one, born of a virgin, is Immanuel, “God with us.”

- Q.** Have you ever felt like God was absent? What was going on in your life during that season or circumstance?

For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness; with you, evil people are not welcome. Psalm 5:4

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. James 1:13-15

These two verses present a terrible problem for us all. Our God cannot dwell in the presence of evil people. He is holy, pure and vengeful. We, of course, seek to skirt around this truth, reserving words like 'evil' for someone or something other than ourselves. But, according to James, every sin you and I have ever committed, thought about or desired to do sprang up from an evil heart (see also Matt. 15:19).

Evil dwells within us. Which is why Ephesians tells us we are all deserving of wrath (Ephesians 2:3).

- Q.** Read vv.20-21 again. What will Emmanuel accomplish? What would happen if he was not able to accomplish it?
- Q.** Knowing what you do about the story of Christ, what will Jesus have to endure to accomplish the forgiveness of sin? Why will He have to endure it? (see Isa. 53:1-12; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 6:23)

Consider the cost of 'God with Us.' Take time to journal a prayer of gratitude or confession on the next page.

-Journal-

"To be justified means more than to be declared "not guilty."
It actually means to be declared righteous before God. It
means God has charged the guilt of our sin to His Son, Jesus
Christ, and has credited Christ's righteousness to us."

-Jerry Bridges

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

The people of God have been waiting on the promised hero for centuries. They knew that God would send one to rescue and lead His people. They knew this person would be a descendent of Abraham, from the royal line of King David and that He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Yet, when the promised hero came, it was not the Jews who gathered to worship and give praise, it was pagan priests.

-THE MAKING OF A MAGI-

The magi were priests from Persia (modern day Iran). Magi had immense influence in the Persian culture, having a regular audience with the Persian Kings and performing religious duties on their behalf. They were extremely well educated and highly respected throughout the world. They loved science, reason and literally worshipped the god of ‘wisdom.’ Convinced that the heavens would reflect significant events on earth, they watched the stars looking for knowledge.

Although the Magi were forbidden to worship Yahweh in the inner courts of the Temple of Jerusalem, these pagan priests from the East travelled the world to kneel at the feet of the infant King.

It is hard to feel the weight of this moment. After all, we are used to singing about it with hot chocolate in hand. "*we three kings . . .*"

God becoming man and dwelling amongst us is beyond our comprehension . . . but it is more reasonable and less miraculous than the fact these Magi were allowed to worship Him.

Seriously. These unclean sinners, these pagan priests, would have been struck dead had they entered the presence of God in the *holy of holies* (Leviticus 16). Yet, we see them enter the presence of the King without fear of rejection.

Q. What surprises you most about the story of the Magi?

Our Creator God moves all things to direct our gaze to the beauty and glory of Jesus. Yes, they saw a star (*which probably refers to a very rare alignment of planets that occurred 3 times in the year 6bc, a few years before the death of Herod*) but there was something far more captivating than this heavenly display. The Scripture says they worshipped the baby King. Worshipped.

Q. What is it about Jesus that is worthy of your worship?

Q. How is the worship of Jesus shaping the way you live?

Q. How is God calling you to grow as a worshipper of Jesus?

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

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: 6 “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”

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

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

11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

HEROD WHO?

There are several Herods who held power around the time of Jesus. Two are mentioned in Matthew. 'Herod the Great,' was appointed by Rome as the 'King of the Jews.' He is the one who meets the Magi and who massacres the children in chapter 2. He was extremely influential but completely paranoid. He murdered many of his friends, supporters and family members, including his wife. His son, Herod Antipas, governed Galilee after his father's death. Herod Antipas is the one who beheaded John Baptist (Matthew 14). Herod Agrippa, Herod the Great's grandson, violently persecuted the church of Jerusalem in the book of Acts (Acts 12).

Christ has always been controversial. That plastic baby in your Christmas decorations might look cute, but murder surrounds the Christmas story.

Consider Herod's response in v.16, "When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi."

Even as a child, people hated Jesus. From the beginning of the gospel to the end, people in power would plot to murder the promised rescuer of God.

Q. As you consider this text, what stands out to you the most?

Q. What is it about Jesus that threatens so many people?

As Americans, we don't think much of Kings. We like to elect the leaders we want and then kick them out when someone comes along that we admire more.

True, we have a strange obsession with royals, castles and princesses, but most of the monarchs of our day are simply the focus of tabloid gossip and lack any real power. Our idea of 'kingdom' has mostly been shaped by Disney movies and nursery rhymes.

But the rule of Christ isn't decided in an election and His Kingdom doesn't fit the stereotype of fairytales.

Revelation 17:14. They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.

Psalms 9:7-12. But the LORD abides forever; He has established His throne for judgment, And He will judge the world in righteousness; He will execute judgment for the peoples with justice. The LORD will be a stronghold for the oppressed, A stronghold in times of trouble.

1 Timothy 1:17. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

- Q.** Why do you think our culture presents Jesus as the sweet baby in the manger more than as the warrior King of scripture?
- Q.** Does the image of Christ as King threaten you or comfort you? Why?

**Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King
Peace on earth and mercy mild
God and sinners reconciled**

**Joyful, all ye nations, rise
Join the triumph of the skies
With angelic host proclaim
Christ is born in Bethlehem
Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King!**

**Christ, by highest heaven adored
Christ, the everlasting Lord
Late in time behold him come
Offspring of the Virgin's womb**

**Hail the Flesh, the God Head see
Hail the incarnate Deity
Pleased as man with man to dwell
Jesus, our Emmanuel!
Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King!**

**Hail the Heaven-born Prince of Peace
Hail the Son of Righteousness
Light and life to all He brings
Risen with healing in His wings**

**Mild He lays His Glory by
Born that man no more may die
Born to raise the sons of earth
Born to give them second birth
Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King!**

Hark the Herald Angel Sings

Family|devo

Set aside **10 minutes** one night this week to talk about God's promise to rescue His children from sin.

DO | Have one member of the family **Light the 2nd Advent Candle.**

DO | Have one member of the family **Read the text out loud.**

And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. **LUKE 2:3-7**

And there, in the stable, amongst the chickens and the donkeys and the cows, in the quiet of the night, God gave the world his wonderful gift. The baby that would change the world was born. God's son. **THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE**

Discuss It. Do you remember the promise we talked about last week? God's promise to send a Rescuer? His promise to send Jesus? Well, Jesus came, just like God said He would!

Have someone read the commentary below.

After thousands of years of waiting, on an ordinary night, Jesus came. God gave His people hints and clues about how Jesus would come. He told them that Jesus would come born in Bethlehem, be a Ruler and bring peace. Many expected a soldier; some expected a politician. No one expected a baby.

Ask: If you had been an Israelite, how would you have expected the promised Savior to come?

Mary and Joseph lived in a town called Nazareth. One day, the king gave an order that everyone was to go back to their hometown to be counted for a census. Mary and Joseph traveled a long way to the town of Bethlehem, where Joseph's family was from. When they got to Bethlehem, the town was full of other travelers, and there was nowhere for Mary and Joseph to stay. So they found a stable to sleep in. While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby, and Jesus, the Savior, was born.

Ask: How do you think Joseph and Mary felt when they finally got to Bethlehem and realized they had nowhere to stay?

Jesus, the King of heaven, left His perfect home to be born a baby to a young man and woman. He became fragile and helpless. His room that night was a stable—dirty, smelly and full of noisy animals. His bed was not kingly and luxurious; it was a feed box that animals ate out of.

Ask: *Is a stable the place you would expect the Savior to be born? Why do you think God decided for His one and only Son to be born there?*

Everything that happened that night was exactly what God had planned and promised. Jesus came, just like God said He would. God saw that we needed to be rescued from sin. He cared about us in our need, and He acted. He sent Jesus.

Pray Together:

(say) Jesus came to save us from our sin and to experience the challenges we face. We can trust Jesus and know that He understand what we are going through. **(pray)** Close in prayer.

Family|activity

Plan a fun activity for the family.

Whether its a Christmas movie night, decorating cookies, building ginger bread houses or seeing Christmas lights, make a plan and give a few hints to your kiddos about what you will do together later this week.

As the days go by, remind them of the activity that you have planned and give them hints to what it might be.

Let their expectation and excitement grow throughout the week. Use this opportunity to remind them of God's promise to send a Rescuer and the anticipation God's people felt as they waited.

Fasting | The goal of fasting is to awaken our hearts to the hunger pains of the soul that can only be satisfied by God.

Quiet the Noise : Whether its entertainment, social media or a meal, choose to forgo one thing today to create space for prayer.

Fasting Focus : *Meditate* on Micah 5:2. The story of Christmas does not begin in Bethlehem during the time of Herod. It starts in eternity past, where God alone, Father, Son and Spirit exists in loving unity. Ponder the wonder of the eternally existing Christ and the story of His promise and presence throughout history.

Throughout your fast, devote time to *Prayer*, moving intentionally through various types of prayer:

Praise | Take time to delight in the beauty of God as you enjoy creation, engage in imagination and meditate on the Scripture.

Intercession | We have been given the weighty responsibility and amazing privilege of making disciples of the next generation. Consider the following questions, asking God to stir your heart for the children at Sojourn and their need for Jesus.

- Q.** What do you hope your child's faith looks like in 5 years?
- Q.** What can we do as a church to be more passionately committed to loving, celebrating and leading children to be disciples of Jesus?

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea **2** and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” **3** This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’” **4** John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.

The good news of God’s promised rescuer comes with the announcement of the rule of God. People throughout the world in ancient times longed for the rule of a good king. They knew the devastation of living under tyrants. They longed for the peace, prosperity and joy that comes from the provision and protection of a truly noble king.

Remember the prophet Malachi? He called God’s people towards the hope of God’s presence, saying, “*For you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves . . . for I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the great and awesome day of the Lord.*” (Malachi 4:2,5)

God’s promised rescuer would bring healing and joy. They would know that he is close when ‘Elijah’ comes.

-Not So Fashionable-

Forget lumber jack flannels or worship leader v-necks, camel hair robes are so couture. Verse 4 seems like a strange detail. Truth is, this short description is profoundly important. God's people were waiting on the promised King, who would appear after a prophet like Elijah appears.

In the first chapter of the book of 2 Kings, King Ahaziah inquired about the prophet who spoke to one of his messengers. The prophet was described as wearing a "garment of hair with a leather belt around his waist." The King responds, "that was Elijah." (v.8)

John came preaching, "repent for the Kingdom of heaven is near." The kingdom of heaven was the promise of healing and joy that God's people longed for. It was "the good life" that would be experienced with the good king's rule was fully realized on earth.

Q. Knowing that Malachi's prophecy was 400 years prior to Jesus, how do you imagine the Israelites felt when they earn the announcement, 'the Kingdom is near.'

Q. Have you personally experience the announcement of God's Kingdom and the rule of Jesus as good news?

Write down where you were and what was happening when you first heard the gospel as 'good news.'

Take time to reflect on why the announcement of Christ's victorious reign is good news.

"The sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings."

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, **2** “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” **3** For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’” **4** Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. **5** Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, **6** and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. **10** Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

11 “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. **12** His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

“The way of the Lord” referenced by John would have reminded the people of God of the “highway of holiness” prophesied by Isaiah, 600 years before Jesus.

Read the prophecy found in Isaiah 35,

*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;
the desert shall rejoice and blossom
abundantly . . . it shall rejoice with joy and singing.
. . . They shall see the glory of the Lord,
the majesty of our God.*

*Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the
feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious
heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God
will come with vengeance . . . He will come and
save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be
opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;*

*then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.
For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert . . .
And a highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Way of Holiness;
the unclean shall not pass over it.
It shall belong to those who walk on the way;
even if they are fools, they shall not go astray
. . . And the ransomed of the Lord shall return*

Isaiah 35

- Q.** What specific promises are included in Isaiah's prophecy that make 'the coming of the Kingdom' in Matthew 3 such good news?

We live in a culture that believe the best things are bought. The best groups and clubs cost money to enter. The good news of the Kingdom goes out to all, but only the humble will enter. "Repent," says John. The word means to 'turn and change direction.'

- Q.** How would you define repentance in your own words?

"You brood of vipers!" Yeah, John probably wouldn't be hired on as the pastor of any local church in our community. The only thing more offensive than his taste in fashion was his choice of words in His messages.

But the truth is that Christmas is offensive. Indeed as Jesus said, "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me." (Matt. 11:6)

So, why the harsh words. Both Malachi and Isaiah's prophecies spoke of joy and healing, but they also spoke of judgment. And John says that no one is safe from the judgment of God, not even people of Israel. This shocked the pharisees who came 'to John's baptism.' They didn't come to repent and be baptized. They came to be seen amongst the crowds. Their hope was in their heritage. "We are sons of Abraham," they thought. But there is no birth right to the promise of Abraham. The good news of the Kingdom goes out to all, but only the humble enter in.

- Q.** In what way do people still rely on their 'heritage,' upbringing or cultural ties to enter the Kingdom of God?
- Q.** What is it about Matthew 1-3 that you find most humbling?
- Q.** How does John's pronouncement shape the way you think about Christmas?

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. **14** John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” **15** But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. **16** And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; **17** and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

John makes clear that his baptism is a baptism ‘for repentance.’ It is a call to the humble to acknowledge their sin and to carry their shame into the waters of God’s mercy.

But John is clear that this ministry is a precursor to a greater work accomplished by the one whose sandals (*feet were considered the dirtiest and most ‘unclean’ part of a person in Ancient Israel*) he was not worthy to touch.

Can you imagine being John. You are telling the world about the coming King, the “lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world,” (*John 1:29*) the “ancient of days” who sits upon an unapproachable throne (*Dan. 7:9-10*). Then, one day, as the people press in along the river, and the promise of the Kingdom echoes off the banks, you see Him. The King approaches.

“Fulfill All Righteousness”

This was Jesus’ response to John’s question about why He is about to be baptized. Jesus is not saying, ‘I’m being baptized to become righteous. He says He must be baptized to fulfill righteousness, that is, He must fulfill the will of the Father. It was the Father’s will for Jesus step into the waters of the Jordan and model for us what it means to obey the Father and be in a right relationship with God.

Q. What do you think it would be like to meet Jesus?

He doesn’t come with a posse. There are no roadies around Jesus, not yet anyway. He was alone, making His way through the crowd. He approaches for baptism.

Q. Why do you think John is so surprised at Jesus’ request to be baptized?

Matthew says, “John would have prevented him.” (v.14) We miss the nuance of this phrase. It literally means to block . . . you know, like a linebacker on the line. Was John frightened, confused or offended?

This was a baptism ‘for repentance,’ which Jesus had no need of. He ‘is without sin’ (1John 3:5). Why would the one who came ‘to save His people from their sins,’ (Matt. 1:21) enter the river of sinners?

Let that question linger today.

Q. Why would the one who came ‘to save His people from their sins,’ enter into the waters with sinners?

Family|devo

Set aside **10 minutes** one night this week to talk about God's promise to rescue His children from sin.

DO | Have one member of the family **Light the 3rd Advent Candle.**

DO | Have one member of the family **Read the text out loud.**

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 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. And this will be a sign for you: you will and a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." **LUKE 2:8-12**

Behind the angel they saw a strange glowing cloud—except it wasn't a cloud, it was angels... troops and troops of angels, armed with light! And they were singing a beautiful song: "Glory to God! To God be Fame and Honor and all our Hoorays!"

THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE

Have someone read the commentary below.

As Mary and Joseph held their newborn Son during those late hours of the night, God began spreading the wonderful news of Jesus' birth to an unusual crowd.

Ask: Who would you expect to be the first to hear the news that God's promised rescuer had come?

We would expect the most important people to be the first to hear about Jesus' birth. But God told the most unusual group first. Back in those days, people looked down on shepherds and even hated them. Most people considered them criminals, thieves and liars. Yet these were the first people to hear that the Rescuer had come. And the way they heard that good news was nothing short of amazing.

While the shepherds watched their sheep in the middle of the night, an angel appeared. The Bible tells us that the shepherds were filled with great fear. This angel was a mighty warrior of the Lord. And he shone with the glory of God. The bright radiance of heaven itself interrupted the deep darkness of the night. It was as if God peeled back the curtain of heaven and gave the shepherds a small glimpse of Himself.

Ask: How do you think the shepherds reacted when they saw the angel?

The angel invited the shepherds to go and see Jesus. We know from the Scripture that the shepherds left everything in the field,

including their sheep, and ran to find Jesus.

Ask: Why do you think the Shepherds were so quick to go and find Jesus?

God invites us all to come to Jesus, just like the Shepherds did.

Pray Together:

Ask someone to thank God for sending Jesus and to pray that others will hear God's invitation to come to Jesus and trust in Him. Let your kids know that they can ask you questions about God's invitation to believe in Jesus.

Family|activity

Serve others together.

Plan a night to go sing Christmas carols or deliver Christmas cookies. Planning might sound boring but it can be meaningful. If you're delivering cookies, turn the music up the night before and enjoy making and decorating cookies together. If its singing, plan out your songs and allow the kids to decide where you will go carol.

Be sure to remind your family that you are doing this for others - allow them to feel the joy in serving others and encourage them to be excited about the joy that other people will feel as a result of what y'all are doing.

Fasting | The goal of fasting is to awaken our hearts to the hunger pains of the soul that can only be satisfied by God.

Quiet the Noise : Whether its entertainment, social media or a meal, choose to forgo one thing today to create space for prayer.

Fasting Focus : *Meditate* on Isaiah 53:2-6. I encourage you to read it several different times. We forget that the joy of Christmas is quickly overshadowed by the reality of Jesus's purpose. In His journey, joy wouldn't be fully realized until Easter morning.

Throughout your fast, devote time to *Prayer*, moving intentionally through various types of prayer:

Thanks | Take time to thank God for each harsh movement of Isaiah 53 and all that Christ accomplished.

Intercession | 'Brought us peace.' (v5) Consider the injustice, brokenness, despair and anger in our nation and, specifically, our community. Take time to pray for peace in each area of need (or for each person) that you think of. Consider the following questions prayerfully.

- Q.** How can Sojourn promote and and work to bring about peace in our city?
- Q.** What does it look like for you to be an agent of peace to the people in your life? Consider this ? for anyone that God brings to mind.

[illegible]

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. **14** John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” **15** But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. **16** And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; **17** and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Every child longs to feel that their parent is ‘well pleased’ with them. For some, their entire life is lived trying to grasp the acceptance that was lacking in the home. There is no denying that the parent-child relationship is the most informative relationship in our lives.

- Q.** How would you describe your relationship with the father?
(note, this question deals with how you are experiencing the father personally not what you ‘believe’ about him)

- Q.** In what way are you still tempted to relate to God out of fear of rejection or need for approval? How does this shape your faith?

Left to our own merit and ability we have no hope of remaining in 'good standing' with the Father (Eph. 2:12). Consider the following scripture,

Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin. - Romans 6:3-6

The gospel of Jesus is often called the 'great exchange.' Our tarnished record, shame and guilt is taken by Jesus and in exchange He gives us His record, righteousness and His position as the accepted child of God.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! - 1 John 3:1

Q. Read back over vv.13-17. How does knowing that we receive what belongs to Jesus change how you read the passage?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

[illegible]

**Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing.**

**Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ,
While fields and floods,
rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy.**

**No more let sins and sorrows grow
Nor thorns infest the ground;
*He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.***

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

Joy to the World

4:1-11

Week 4 | Lesson TWELVE

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. **2** After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” **4** Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” **5** Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. **6** “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: “‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” **7** Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” **8** Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. **9** “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” **10** Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” **11** Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

The Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness. You should probably read that again . . . The Spirit leads Him into the wilderness. Prosperity gospel that one. Sometimes our loving God leads us into the dry and weary places.

There are three temptations. Each designed to call into question what the Father declared at the end of chapter 3. **"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."** (3:17)

Have you ever struggled with doubt in your relationship with God? **"Where is He?" "Does He really love me?" "Am I really accepted?" "Is this the best there is?" "Is He really faithful to His promises?" "Can I trust God?"**

As the Tempter said to Eve, "did God really say . . . ?" I wonder if there is anything more damaging to relationships than doubt.

We usually read this passage and focus on what the Tempter offered. But that isn't the purpose of the Tempter's attack. The goal of sin isn't to give us anything. No, the Tempter's goal is to lead Jesus to doubt the Father and to forsake His mission.

Temptation #1: "If you really were God's beloved son, then He would provide for you. Does God really starve His children? Is he a good Father? No, Jesus, you are alone. God doesn't love you. You better provide for yourself. I told you, you can't depend on anyone but yourself."

Temptation #2: "If you really were God's beloved son He wouldn't have led you into the wilderness to be alone. You are neglected, like an outcast, you are rejected. Come follow me Jesus, into the life and joy of the city. Look, everyone is here. Your rightful place is above everyone else - show off Jesus. Do something great! Let them be amazed at you- for that is exactly where the Son of God belongs."

Temptation #3: "I know you came to win the world. Every nation will one day bow to you as the rightful King forever. All wealth and every treasure of this place is yours. Jesus, I know the Father told you that you would have to drink the cup of wrath, you would have to suffer and die. The Father will lead you to feel the sting of be rejected by your friends. I won't ask you to do that Jesus. I will give you all of this, right now without the suffering. Aren't I a more loving god than the Father? Worship me."

Q. How does this passage change the way you think about temptation and sin?

Q. Which of the 3 temptations do you struggle with the most?

Instead of independence, self-glorification and self-protection, Jesus surrendered to the Father and began His journey as the suffering-servant.

Q. Read back through the verses. How did Jesus overcome the Tempters attack?

Q. How do you resonate with the image of Jesus, suffering in the wilderness?

Q. How is God inviting you to trust him in the season you are in right now?

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. **2** After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” **4** Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” **5** Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. **6** “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: “‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” **7** Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” **8** Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. **9** “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” **10** Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” **11** Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

This isn't the first time we have seen the wilderness in the Bible. You remember the Israelites? God saved them out of Egypt. They passed through the waters of the Red Sea and went into (wait for it) . . . the wilderness. Forty Years in the wilderness.

God said Israel would make Him known among the nations and would be a blessing to our broken world. (Isa. 42:6, Exod. 19:5-6)
But they failed . . . Miserably. Their doubting, crooked and corrupt hearts were exposed with every step they took in the wilderness.

Now. Consider the gospel of Matthew afresh. **Chapter 1** traces God's promise of a future hero from Abraham to Jesus. From **Chapter 2 - Chapter 4**, we see God arranging the life of Jesus so that we would have no doubt about who He is . . . He is the true Israel, who would be 'a light to the world.' Like Moses, his parents rescued Him from a murderous King who commanded the murder of 1,000s of young boys.

In chapter two, Jesus and his family is led out of Egypt by God and the very next thing we see in Matthew's gospel is Him passing through the waters of the Jordan river. Jesus passes through the waters of the river and goes into the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights. In chapter four, each victory Jesus has over the Tempter's attack corresponds with a huge failure in the life of the Israelites.

So. Why the similarities? Is Matthew just making all this up so his Jewish audience, who were the first to read His gospel, would be better engaged?

Matthew includes these crazy details because Jesus is fulfilling all the old testament prophecies concerning the Promised Rescuer of God. JESUS IS THE TRUE and PERFECT ISRAEL.

The hope of the Israelites was rooted in a perfect descendent of Abraham who would be the Stand-In for a failed and sinful people. **Advent is about our longing for the Hero of God.**

When you and I read about the temptation of Jesus we should fight hard against the temptation to make this about us. Yes, you and I should fight against sin and we, like Jesus, should use scripture to combat the lies of the Tempter. But don't miss the purpose of this text.

Matthew's goal is not that we would have more confidence in our ability to fight of the Tempter. His goal is that we would have confidence in Jesus' victory over the tempter.

JESUS SUCCEEDS WHERE WE FAIL. He is the True and Perfect son who stands-in for sinners.

-Journal-

12 When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. **13** Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— **14** to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: **15** “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— **16** the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. **19** “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” **20** At once they left their nets and followed him. **21** Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, **22** and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. **24** News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. **25** Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

A lot of attention has been given to highlight the growing distance in our relationships. Most of us spend more time with our phones than our family. Too many of us think about 'Likes' and 'Follows' more than handshakes and hugs, valuing an ever-expanding fan base over lasting, meaningful friendships.

At the end of chapter four of Matthew's gospel we finally have this sense that people are beginning to see Jesus for who He is. He is the light of the world! The crowds flock to the promised hero of God (v.25) !

But the crowds who pushed in close to see the signs and be amazed at the miracles would, in three years time, shout 'crucify him!' (Matt. 27:22)

Jesus was not seeking a fan base. (John 2:22-24) From this point on in Matthew's gospel we will see a growing contrast between those who followed Jesus and those who showed up for the show.

There are a lot of parallels that we could draw out. After all, every Christmas season there seem to be a lot more fans than there are true followers.

- Q.** What do you think Jesus' followers (the disciples) saw in Christ that the crowds missed?
- Q.** How would you describe the difference between fan and follower?
- Q.** How is God inviting you to experience and celebrate Jesus this Christmas?

-Journal-

Family|devo

Set aside **10 minutes** one night this week to talk about God's promise to rescue His children from sin.

DO | Have one member of the family **Light the 4th Advent Candle.**

DO | Have one member of the family **Read the text out loud.**

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

MATTHEW 2:1-2, 11-12.

The journey that had begun so many centuries before had led three wise men here. To a little town. To a little house. To a little child. To the king God had promised David all those years before. **THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE**

Discuss It. Last week we hear the Angels proclaim Christ's birth to the Shepherds who were watching over their sheep. Tonight, we see God extending salvation to the whole world!

Have an adult read the commentary below.

The bible tells us that God placed a special star in the sky, a bright body of light that announced the birth of the King. Some men in a faraway country saw this star. They were called Magi.

There was nothing particularly special about these men. But there was something extraordinary about God's invitation for them to come and worship Jesus.

Throughout the Bible, God promise to send a Rescuer was given to the Israelites, God's chosen people. But these Magi were not Israelites. They didn't even believe in God. But when they saw the start they left their home to find Jesus. They journeyed a very long way for a very long time.

Ask: Why do you think the Magi were willing to leave their homes and families and travel for such a long time to find Jesus?

The Bible tells us that when the Magi found the place where Jesus was living, they entered the house, bowed down and worshiped Him. Each magi brought a special and costly gift for Jesus.

Ask: Why do you think they brought Jesus such special, expensive gifts?

Throughout the Advent story, we see that God is generous. He sent a company of angels to shout the good news of Jesus' birth to the shepherds and He put a special star in the sky to guide

men from a faraway country to Jesus. God's invitation to the Magi reminds us that He extends salvation to all nations. God desires that all people know, love, trust and obey Jesus.

Pray Together:

Ask a family member to thank God that He invites each of us to know and worship Jesus. Pray that God will show people of all nations the good news that Jesus came to save sinners.

Family|activity

Pray together.

It's craft time. Spend time making a prayer garland together. Cut out 25 colorful construction paper strips. On each strip, write the name of a family member, friend, ministry, or missionary that has been placed on your hearts. Staple or glue the strips to form links to a long garland. Hang that garland in your house alongside your other Christmas decorations.

As you all gather at the end of the day as a family, have a family member remove one of the paper links. As a family pray for the person or ministry listed on that strip of paper.

Those 25 links will take you well into the New Year- what better way to end Advent and start the New Year off than by praying for others! Pray that your family (and those you wrote on your paper garland) would experience Jesus in new and exciting ways this Christmas and in the coming year.

Fasting | The goal of fasting is to awaken our hearts to the hunger pains of the soul that can only be satisfied by God.

Quiet the Noise : Whether its entertainment, social media or a meal, choose to forgo one thing today to create space for prayer.

Fasting Focus : *Meditate* on Luke 2:8-20. Consider the shock of the angelic invitation, the intimate setting where they met the Christ and the amazement of those who heard about it.

Throughout your fast, devote time to *Prayer*, moving intentionally through various types of prayer:

Thanks | Take time to reflect on your Advent journey and thank God for the faithfulness and love that He has displayed through the life of Jesus.

Intercession | Reflect on Luke 2:18. Pray that the people in your life who do not know Jesus will one day erupt in amazement at the good news of God's salvation.

- Q.** What would it look like to share the good news of Jesus with Joy?
- Q.** What, if anything, hinders you from sharing like the Shepherds?

Christmas Eve | Pray for everyone who will gather and hear the gospel at our Christmas Eve service. Consider inviting a neighbor or showing up early to welcome and minister to others.

-2018-

How is God inviting you to grow in your faith in 2018?

Prayerfully consider what you desire your life to look like one year from now in each of the areas below one.

Write a vision statement for each.

Relationship with God.

Home (marriage, kids, parents)

Work (or School)

What do you hope God will do at Sojourn in 2018?

What are 3 Goals you want to pursue in 2018?

JOURNAL

**SOJOURN WOODSTOCK
ADVENT 2017**

