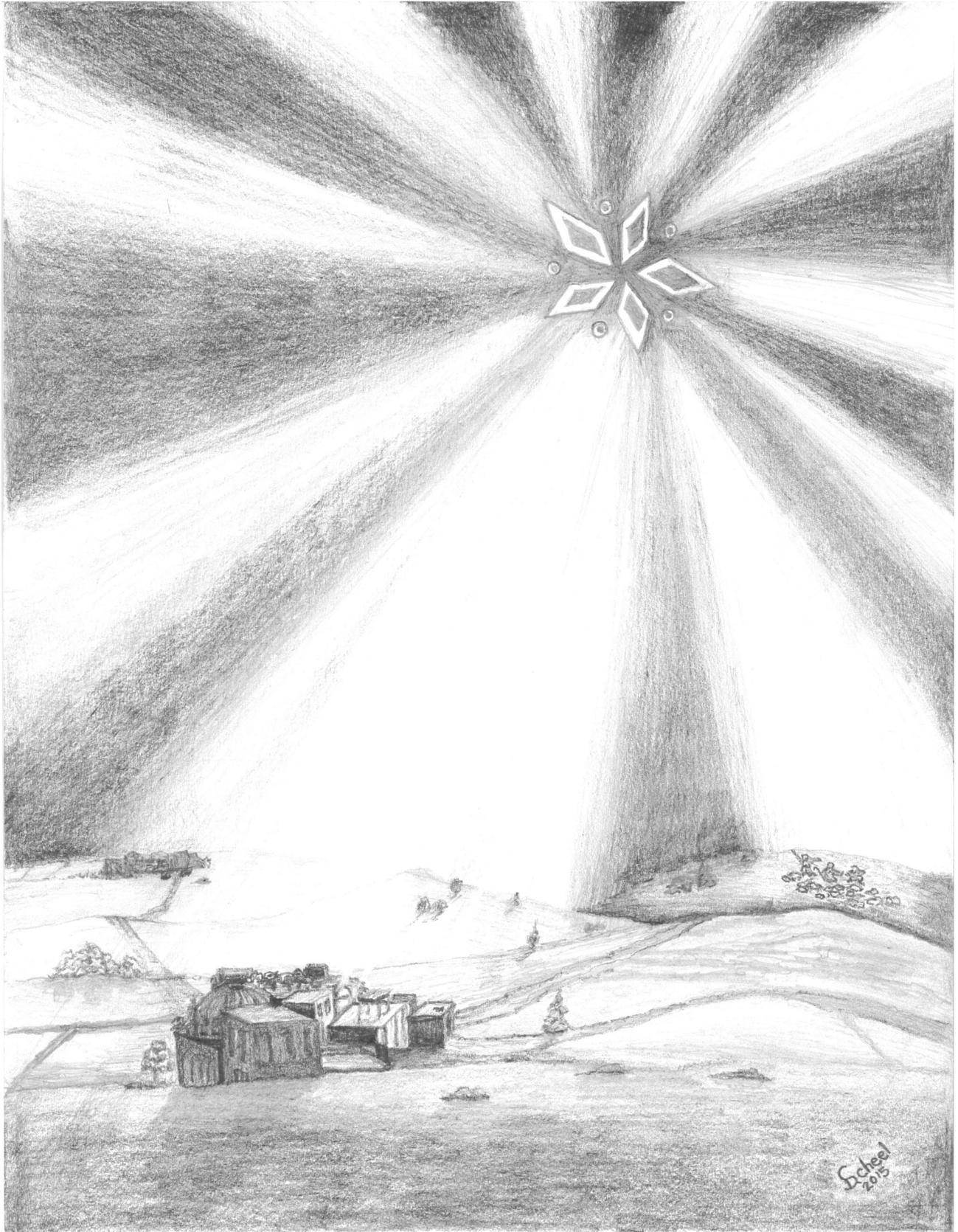


COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



ADVENT 2018

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(The inscription on the staff in this piece is Hebrew for “Come Immanuel.”)

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Family Tree, Lisa Updike, page 14

Cradle to Cross, Hannah Good, page 28

Gabriel Visiting Mary, Audrey Davis, page 32

Story Map of Jesus’ Life, Lisa Updike, page 42

Star over Bethlehem, traced, Hannah Good, page 58

Give Thanks, Lisa Updike, page 62

Mary and Elizabeth, traced and drawn, Lisa Updike, page 34

Coloring pages 10, 16, 20, *God’s Story Bible Coloring Book*. Great Commission Publications, 2001.

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We are grateful for the elders of Covenant Presbyterian Church. We are blessed to have them shepherd us, lead us and provide their thoughts for the devotions in this booklet.

Many thanks to Grace Good, Teresa Wildermuth, Angie Davis, and Lisa Updike who took on this project and helped make it a reality. They invested countless hours in putting this booklet together, arranging artwork, proof-reading, etc. This Advent Devotional would not exist if not for their efforts. We have an amazing Support Staff here at Covenant Presbyterian Church. We are grateful for their investment in the life of this church and their work on this devotional.



Light of the World

The “magic” of Christmas is an elusive idea full of catchy jingles, sparkly lights, trees, snow, and tinsel. Those things may be enjoyable, but they do not lead us to the momentous significance of Advent. The reality of Christmas is far better than magic; it is miraculous. The Word of God became flesh. The true Light came into the dark world. Jesus, the God-Man, was born.

In the midst of the “magic” and the busyness of the Christmas season, we, your elders, are asking you to pause, to set aside time to meditate on the miraculous, and to consider with us the blessing and joy of the coming of Jesus, the Christ.

The story of Christ’s coming is one that spans all of human history from the whispers of Him found in Genesis 3 through the promise of His second coming in Revelation. Every passage of Scripture points to Him in some way. During these weeks of Advent, we invite you to make a habit of engaging God’s Word with us. We pray that this habit will go far beyond the Advent season and that you would find time regularly to be in the Word throughout the rest of the year. We hope this booklet will aid you as a guide for your individual or family devotions.

We tried to make this booklet accessible for folks in different life stages. Depending on the time you have and your family situation, you may choose to read and engage in every part of the devotional on a particular day, but you may also just pick out a few parts to focus on. Whether you’re young or old, we hope that you will connect with God’s Word through this devotional.

As you take in the Scriptures, sing the songs (perhaps just in your own mind, but feel free to do it out loud), read our elders’ thoughts on the passages, ask questions, do the activities...we pray you’ll be amazed, challenged, and changed by the astounding love of Christ. We pray that the reality of the saving work of Jesus will be impressed upon your hearts so that you can go and be the light of the world to your family, to your neighbors, to your classmates, to your coworkers, and to your friends.

Even as we celebrate Christ’s first coming, let us long for His second all the more.

Come and worship Christ the King!

Burress McCombe

Pastor of Worship

Of the Father's Love Begotten 118

I am the Alpha and the Omega . . . the Beginning and the End. Rev. 22:13

Unison

1. Of the Fa - ther's love be - got - ten, Ere the worlds be - gan
 2. O ye heights of heav'n a - dore Him; An - gel hosts, His prais -
 3. Christ, to Thee with God the Fa - ther, And, O Ho - ly Ghost,

to be, He is Al - pha and O - me - ga, He the Source, the
 es sing; Pow'rs, do - min - ions, bow be - fore Him, And ex - tol our
 to Thee, Hymn and chant and high thanks - giv - ing And un - wea - ried

End - ing He, Of the things that are, that have been,
 God and King; Let no tongue on earth be si - lent,
 prais - es be: Hon - or, glo - ry, and do - min - ion,

And that fu - ture years shall see, Ev - er - more and ev - er - more!
 Ev - 'ry voice in con - cert ring, Ev - er - more and ev - er - more!
 And e - ter - nal vic - to - ry, Ev - er - more and ev - er - more! A - men.

TEXT: Aurelius C. Prudentius, 4th century;
 translated by John M. Neale and Henry W. Baker
 MUSIC: Plainsong, 13th century; arranged by C. Winfred Douglas

DIVINUM MYSTERIUM
 8.7.8.7.8.7.7.

The First Sunday in Advent
December 2, 2018

Sunday, December 2	page 1	John 1:1-5	In the Beginning Was the Word
Monday, December 3	page 3	Genesis 3:14-15	The "First Gospel"
Tuesday, December 4	page 7	Psalms 132:11-12	A Son of David on the Throne
Wednesday, December 5	page 9	Isaiah 7:10-14	A Virgin with Child
Thursday, December 6	page 11	Isaiah 9:6-7	To Us a Child is Born
Friday, December 7	page 13	Isaiah 11:1-5	The Branch from Jesse
Saturday, December 8	page 15	Isaiah 40:1-5, 9	Comfort for God's People

The Second Sunday in Advent
December 9, 2018

Sunday, December 9	page 19	Isaiah 60:1-3	Arise, Shine, for Your Light Has Come
Monday, December 10	page 21	Jeremiah 33:14-16	The Righteous Branch
Tuesday, December 11	page 23	Matthew 1:1-17	The Genealogy of Jesus
Wednesday, December 12	page 27	Matthew 5:17-20	The Fulfillment of the Law
Thursday, December 13	page 31	Luke 1:26-38	Jesus' Birth Foretold
Friday, December 14	page 33	Luke 1:39-45	Elizabeth and Mary
Saturday, December 15	page 35	Luke 1:46-55	Mary's Song of Praise

The Third Sunday in Advent
December 16, 2018

Sunday, December 16	page 37	Philippians 2:6-11	The Servanthood of Christ
Monday, December 17	page 39	Matthew 1:18-24	Christ's Birth (Matthew's Account)
Tuesday, December 18	page 41	Luke 2:1-7	Christ's Birth (Luke's Account)
Wednesday, December 19	page 45	John 1:9-13	The True Light
Thursday, December 20	page 47	Luke 2:8-20	The Shepherds and the Angels
Friday, December 21	page 51	Colossians 1:15-23	The Supremacy of Christ
Saturday, December 22	page 53	Luke 2:25-35	Jesus Presented at the Temple

The Fourth Sunday in Advent
December 23, 2018

Sunday, December 23	page 57	Matthew 2:1-9	The Visit of the Magi
Monday, December 24	page 59	Revelation 22:16-17	Jesus, the Bright Morning Star

Christmas Day
December 25, 2018

Tuesday, December 25	page 61	John 1:14-18	The Word Became Flesh
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John 1:1-5

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Of the Father's Love Begotten

Of the Father's love begotten
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the Source, the Ending He,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see,
Evermore and evermore!

O ye heights of heav'n, adore Him;
Angel hosts, His praises sing;
All dominions, bow before Him
And extol our God and King;

Let no tongue on earth be silent,
Ev'ry voice in concert ring,
Evermore and evermore!

Christ, to Thee, with God the Father,
And O Holy Ghost, to Thee,
Hymn, and chant, and high thanksgiving,
And unwearied praises be,
Honor, glory, and dominion,
And eternal victory,
Evermore and evermore!

Text: Aurelius Prudentius Music: Plainsong, 12th cent.

"If there is, among the distinctive articles of the Christian faith, one which is basic to all others, it is this: *that our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became man for our salvation.* This is the affirmation that we have in mind when we speak of the doctrine of the incarnation." (F. F. Bruce)

It should not surprise us that John's account of Jesus' life begins with words so much like the opening words of Genesis. For it was through Jesus that God was going to do what was necessary to bring about a new creation. God would bring this about through means of the incarnation, perhaps the chief miracle in all the Bible.

The doctrine of the incarnation is established in numerous passages which speak of Jesus as "coming *in the flesh*" (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7), being "sent *in the flesh*" (Romans 8:3), "appearing *in the flesh*" (1 Timothy 3:16); he also "suffered *in the flesh*" (1 Peter 4:1), "died *in the flesh*" (1 Peter 3:18), made peace by abolishing "*in the flesh* the enmity" (Ephesians 2:15), and "made reconciliation *in the body of his flesh*" (Colossians 1:21-22). In sum, "*the Word became flesh*" (John 1:14).

Thus, by the *Incarnation* we mean that the eternal Word or second Person of the Trinity became a man or assumed human flesh at a point in time, yet without ceasing to be God.

What is the significance of John referring to Jesus as "the Word"? There are many theories, but the most probable is that John is making reference to Genesis chapter 1. In the beginning God spoke creation into being. God speaks and worlds are made. In this sense Jesus is the Triune God communicating to us by the Person of the Son. The Word has always been God and *with* God. Here John is taking us into the depths of the Trinitarian nature of God. John is challenging any suggestion that Jesus is anything less than fully and eternally divine. At the same time John is showing that the Son has entered the created order. He truly became a man. He entered into our plight, yet without sin. The Christ became a baby in a manger without ceasing to be the eternally existing Son.

John uses the simplest grammar to establish the fact of Jesus' divinity. In every sense that we understand God being God we are to understand Jesus. In terms of His nature, attributes, and abilities Jesus was everything that God is. He was not half God and half man. The incarnation means that Jesus became fully man without losing one iota of His "Godness." He certainly did give up certain privileges belonging to His divine nature, but not once was His divine nature compromised or diminished.

What is more, Jesus is the agent of creation. "Without him was not anything made that was made." He is the one who gives and sustains life. Everything in the universe bears the stamp "Made by Jesus Christ." It is Jesus, therefore, who holds the keys to life. We find in Him what it means to truly live. And in believing these things, in believing in Jesus as He is and for what He has done, we have that life which casts away all darkness.

-Todd Pruitt

Main Ideas Made Simple

Listen very closely to John 1:1-5. Now, listen very closely to Genesis 1:1-2. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."

How are these verses similar? To understand these Bible passages, we need to know that Jesus is completely God and completely man at the very same time. We must also know that Jesus is the Word. So, when we read that in the beginning was the Word and that the Word was with God and the Word was God, we know that it is Jesus Whom this is all about. Jesus is God, and through Jesus all things were created!

Some things to think and talk about...

How did God make the world, with His hands, or with His Word?
What do we use to communicate with each other?
How does God communicate with us?

Activity

Using only actions or pictures (we've provided a space below) try to tell your family...

- your favorite meal
- your favorite game
- your favorite animal
- other things you can think to gesture

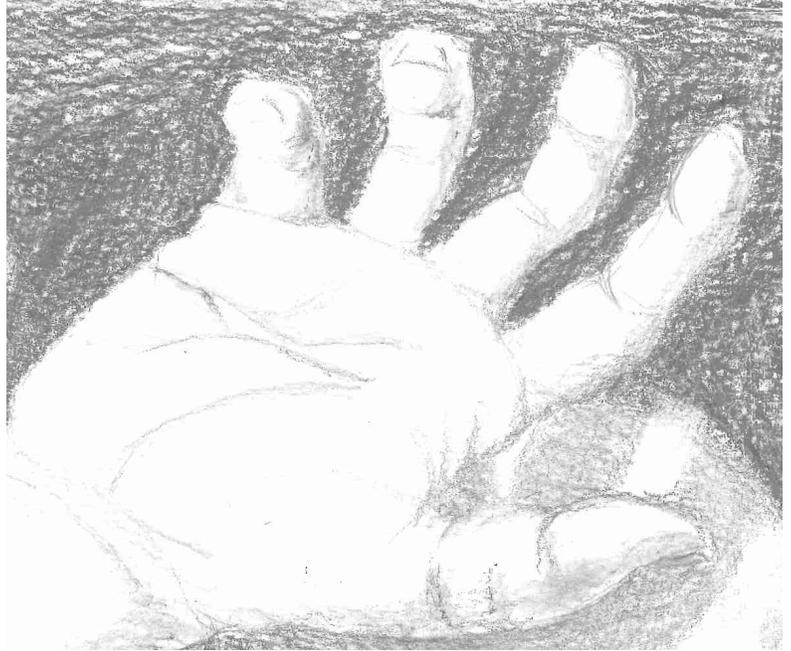
It is fun trying to communicate without words, but isn't very easy, is it? Words help us communicate, and Jesus became the Word to communicate God's great love for us.



Genesis 3:14-15

¹⁴ The Lord God said to the serpent,
“Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
He shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise His heel.”



Infant Holy, Infant Lowly

Infant holy, Infant lowly,
For His bed a cattle stall;
Oxen lowing, little knowing
Christ the babe is Lord of all.
Swift are winging angels singing,
Noels ringing, tidings bringing:
Christ the babe is Lord of all,
Christ the babe is Lord of all!

Flocks were sleeping,
Shepherds keeping
Vigil till the morning new;
Saw the glory, heard the story,
Tidings of a gospel true.
Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow,
Praises voicing, greet the morrow:
Christ the babe was born for you,
Christ the babe was born for you.

Sin brought God's curse;
Hope in Christ's birth
Jesus came to make things new
Empty cradle, empty stable,
Empty tomb now serve as proof
God became flesh, dwelt among us
Overcame death, now victorious
Christ the King gives grace to you
Christ the King is grace for you.

*Trad. Polish carol arr. Joseph Barlowe, Text paraphrased by Edith Reed;
3rd verse written by Burriss McCombe*

Enmity. As in hostility or deep division. Not a word you'll see on many Christmas cards, but to truly appreciate Jesus' first coming, we must understand enmity's meaning.

What God created was good, very good. The sin that the serpent led man into was not good. It was worse than not good; it broke relationship and brought division between man and his Holy God. Enmity.

Now, enter joy and peace. The reason *joy* is a word so often associated with Christmas is because of the arrival of the Infant holy, Infant lowly—God's Son Jesus—who makes peace possible between fallen man and His Holy God.

*Praise be to God the Father for sending us the Infant lowly,
Who has paid for His followers' sin and makes us holy.*

-Jim Smith

Main Ideas Made Simple

Enmity. That's a word we don't hear that much. It means two people have become enemies and are divided. It means there is a broken relationship.

As God created the earth, He said at the end of each day that it was good. After making Adam and Eve He said it was *very* good. But (and this is a big but) the serpent led Adam and Eve into sin. That was the opposite of good. It was really, really bad. And it brought enmity—enmity between the serpent and Eve—and a broken relationship between us and God.

How sad it is to have a broken relationship with God! But Jesus came to bring peace between us and God to fix that broken relationship!

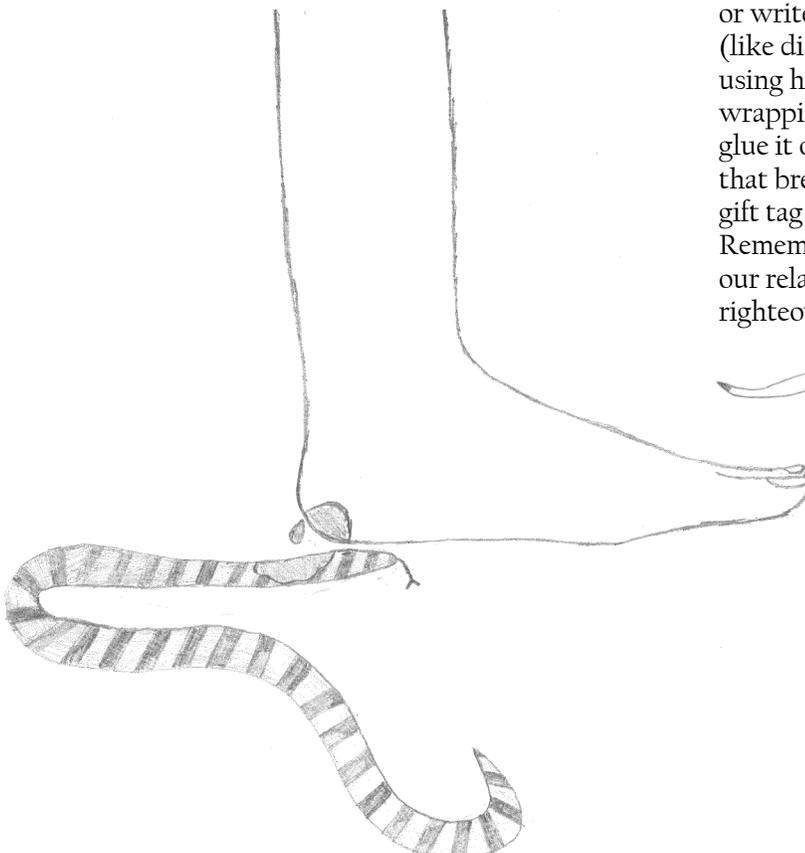
Some things to think and talk about...

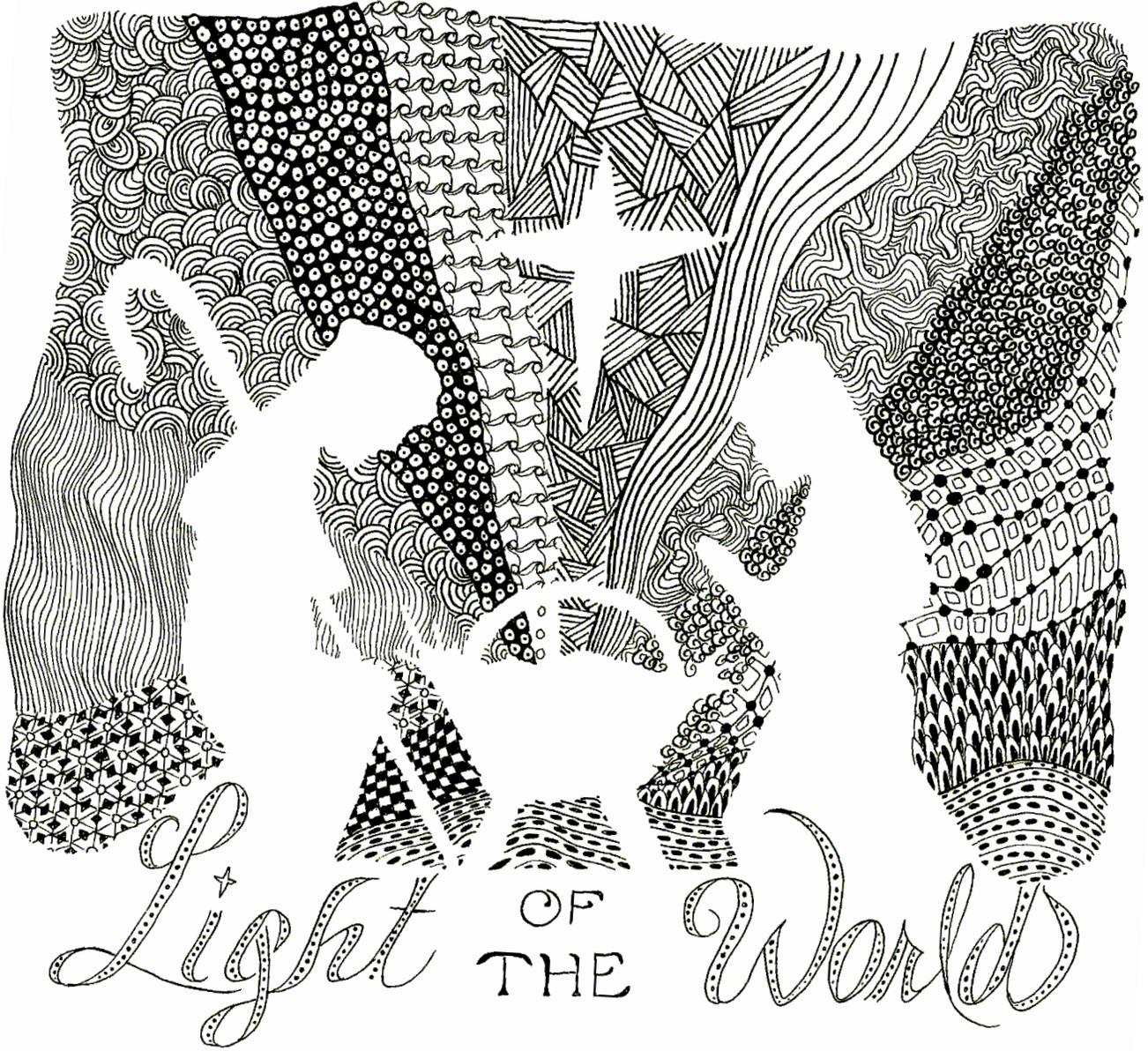
Tell about a time you and a friend, or a family member hurt each other's feelings. Or remember a time you disobeyed your Mom and Dad. Have you ever had a time out? How do you feel when your relationships with those you love gets broken, even for a little bit. How do you feel when you need to be alone and separated from the fun of the family or class?

Activity



Take a piece of paper and draw pictures or write words of things that break relationships (like disobeying Mommy, pushing your sister, or using harsh or mean words). Take a piece of wrapping paper the same size as the paper and glue it on top of the paper and cover the things that break relationships. Add a pretty bow and a gift tag that says, "Jesus is the best present." Remember, His blood covers our sins and heals our relationship with God. God sees the righteousness of Christ instead of our sin.





O Little Town of Bethlehem 141

Bethlehem . . . , out of you will come for Me One who will be ruler over Israel. Mic. 5:2

1. O lit - tle town of Beth - le - hem, How still we see thee lie!
 2. For Christ is born of Ma - ry, And gath - ered all a - bove,
 3. How si - lent - ly, how si - lent - ly The won - drous gift is giv'n!
 4. O ho - ly Child of Beth - le - hem! De - scend to us, we pray;

A - bove thy deep and dream - less sleep The si - lent stars go by.
 While mor - tals sleep, the an - gels keep Their watch of won - d'ring love.
 So God im - parts to hu - man hearts The bless - ings of His heav'n.
 Cast out our sin, and en - ter in; Be born in us to - day.

Yet in thy dark streets shin - eth The ev - er - last - ing Light;
 O morn - ing stars, to - geth - er Pro - claim the ho - ly birth!
 No ear may hear His com - ing, But in this world of sin,
 We hear the Christ - mas an - gels The great glad ti - dings tell;

The hopes and fears of all the years Are met in thee to - night.
 And prais - es sing to God the King, And peace to men on earth.
 Where meek souls will re - ceive Him still The dear Christ en - ters in.
 O come to us, a - bide with us, Our Lord Em - man - u - el. A - men.

Psalm 132:11-12

¹¹ The LORD swore to David a sure oath
from which he will not turn back:

“One of the sons of your body
I will set on your throne.

¹² If your sons keep my covenant
and my testimonies that I shall teach them,
their sons also forever
shall sit on your throne.”



O Little Town of Bethlehem

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

For Christ is born of Mary,
And gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wond'ring love.
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth!
And praises sing to God the King,
And peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessing of His heav'n.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still
The dear Christ enters in.

O holy child of Bethlehem!
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in;
Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel.

Text: Phillips Brooks, 1868; Music: Lewis H. Redner, 1868

If you were told that one of your children would be the greatest sports player *the world* has ever seen, how would you react? Excited? I would be.

But what if that “child” wouldn’t be born as your son, but as your great-great-grandchild; therefore, you would never see the day of his birth. You would never meet.

And then what if it were said, that in order for this great-great-grandchild to be the greatest, all of your children and their children, and so on, needed to be straight A+ students? Still excited? Not so much. But then something amazing happens. You’re told that this will happen even *in spite* of the very failures of your own children and their children.

How?

This truth only exists in Christianity. It is called grace. Even though we fail, God does not. Even though David’s offspring failed and failed miserably, God still swore an eternal oath that He would always keep: “One of the sons of your body *I will set on your throne.*”

His name is Christ Jesus. He is the offspring of David by twenty-four generations. He was born in a lowly estate in Bethlehem and died a lowly death. But He rose from the dead out of love, not by the help of His friends or family members, only by Himself and Himself alone. Jesus died the death that we should have died for our sin so that for those of us who receive Him, He promises to now abide with us by His Spirit. He is Emmanuel (“God with us”).

For those of us who look to *this Son*, and put our hope in him alone, we will never be let down. It is God Who keeps His promises, and not us.

-Aaron Roberts

Main Ideas Made Simple

If you were told that your child would be the greatest sports star the world has ever seen, how would you feel? Pretty excited? I bet! Ah, but wait. It's not going to be your own child, but your great-great-grandchild. You won't be around to see it happen. Still, pretty neat, it's just too bad you'll miss out on the excitement. Hold on—one more detail you need to know. In order for your great-great-grandchild to be the greatest sports star the world has ever known, all of your children and all of their children have to be straight A+ students. Nothing less than an A+, ever! Well now you might feel pretty bummed out. Who could ever reach those standards?

Then something amazing happens. You are promised that even though you aren't good enough, and your kids won't be good enough, and their kids won't be good enough, a way will be made for this incredibly gifted child to be born anyway!

Wow!

What is this thing that makes a way even through our failure? It is called *grace*. You see, King David's children failed, but God still kept this promise to David: "One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne." His name is Jesus! He is the offspring of David...twenty-four generations later! Jesus was fully God and fully man at the same time. He lived a perfect life that we could not live, died a terrible death in our place, paying the penalty for our sins, and then conquered death by rising from the dead! He lives inside all who receive Him by His Holy Spirit. He is called Emmanuel, which means God with us.

Yes, God keeps His promises. We cannot be good enough to earn the promises, but our hope is in Him alone!

Some things to think and talk about...

Emmanuel means "God with us." Why is Jesus Emmanuel? How is He still Emmanuel even though He no longer walks the earth as a man? Grace is God's favor to us, even though we cannot earn it. Where are places you see God's grace at work in the scriptures and in your own lives?

Activity

Make a "God with Us" Ornament

Materials:

- Twigs that are pretty straight, about 8 inches long
- Craft and Christmas ribbon, with a green theme if possible (not curling ribbon)
- Scissors
- Tacky glue, or glue gun

Instructions:

- Use ten strips of ribbon
- Using a box knot, which will make the ribbons stand out straight and not turn up and down, tie the first ribbon around the branch and continue to tie all ten ribbons up the branch.
- Once the ribbons are all tied on, trim them into a tree shape.
- Make a loop out of more ribbon, or yarn and glue onto the tree ornament to create a hanger.



The stick wasn't good enough to decorate a tree with, was it? But the presence of the ribbon transformed an old twig into something beautiful! The stick didn't do anything. Trying harder won't do anything to make us special, but the presence of God in our lives is what changes us!

Isaiah 7:10-14

¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ “Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” ¹² But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.” ¹³ And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”

What Child Is This?

What Child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary!

Why lies He in such mean estate,
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear, shall pierce Him through;
The cross be borne for me, for you:
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.



So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh;
Come, peasant, king, to own Him;
The King of kings salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.
Raise, raise the song on high,
The virgin sings her lullaby:
Joy, joy for Christ is born,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

*Text: Traditional English Carol;
Tune: 16th Century English melody*

The kingdom of Israel was divided, and the Northern Kingdom Israel was warring against the Southern Kingdom Judah. In the midst of conflict and fear, the prophet Isaiah, through a word from the Lord, gave a comforting message for King Ahaz that Judah would be spared. The sign of assurance of victory was the prophecy of the virgin birth of the Christ Child, Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14).

Over 700 years later, as the nation of Israel was under the domination of the Roman Empire, the Lord fulfilled that sign as Mary gave forth the virgin birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:18-25). Also fulfilled was the prophecy that He would even come forth from the tribe of Judah (Micah 5:2). Yet even as His birth came to pass, conflict and fear followed his arrival as King Herod sought to kill him.

What child is this that came amidst a world of conflict and fear? As the Holy Spirit spoke to Joseph, “And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He Who will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). This Son of Mary was born to die for sinners, Who gave Himself a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:6).

As we face our daily fears or conflicts, this Babe gives us these words of comfort, “Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (John 14:27). The church of Jesus Christ has also been given a sign of assurance and hope of victory, for in our partaking of the Lord's Supper we remember His life, death and resurrection until He comes, for He is our great salvation (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). “So let us raise, raise the song on high, the virgin sings her lullaby: Joy, joy for Christ is born, the Babe, the Son of Mary.”

-Ken VanSickle

Main Ideas Made Simple

It was kind of a scary time for King Ahaz. There was a lot of conflict in and around his kingdom. Because God is so kind, He wanted to give Ahaz a sign. He was letting Ahaz know that there would come a time when Jesus would come and bring peace between God and man.

We still have trouble on earth, but we can remember that God has sent Jesus, and we can be at peace with God through His Son.

Some things to think and talk about...

How does knowing that Jesus is with us bring comfort? Since Jesus isn't in human form any more, He often uses His people to bring comfort to one another. What are some ways you can comfort others?

Activity

Do some of the things that you talked about to bring comfort. Maybe give a friend a hug, or smile, or a nice card. Maybe take someone who lives alone a meal or a plate of cookies with a note reminding them of God's great love for them.

For you to color...



Isaiah 9:6-7

⁶ 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.

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

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 th’ angelic host proclaim,
“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”
Hark! the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King.”

Christ, by highest heav’n adored;
Christ, the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come,
Offspring of the Virgin’s womb:
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail th’ incarnate Deity,

⁷ Of the increase of His government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over His kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Pleased as man with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King.”

Hail the heav’n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Ris’n 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.”

Text: Charles Wesley

Music: Felix Mendelssohn; arranged by William H. Cummings

As we have been taught and know, all of Scripture points to Jesus. We read earlier in the week in Genesis 3 veiled language of One who was coming who would bruise the head of the serpent. Much of the Old Testament writing that is pointing to Jesus uses veiled language referencing One Who is to come.

This passage in Isaiah is different; the Lord is using very clear, unmistakable, and direct language. The Lord states Who is coming (a son), how He is coming (as a child), what His ultimate role will be (King over all—“The government shall be upon his shoulders”), and then the Lord gives us names that He shall be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. These names speak directly to the attributes of the One coming.

Don’t miss the last sentence of verse 7 which states how all of this will take place. “The zeal (passion) of the Lord of hosts will do this.”

May we rejoice this advent season with the angels and all who have been reconciled to Christ in the One who was “Born that man no more may die...Born to give them second birth.”

-Gary Shickel



Main Ideas Made Simple

What does the Old Testament tell us? A Savior is coming!

What does the New Testament tell us? A Savior has come!

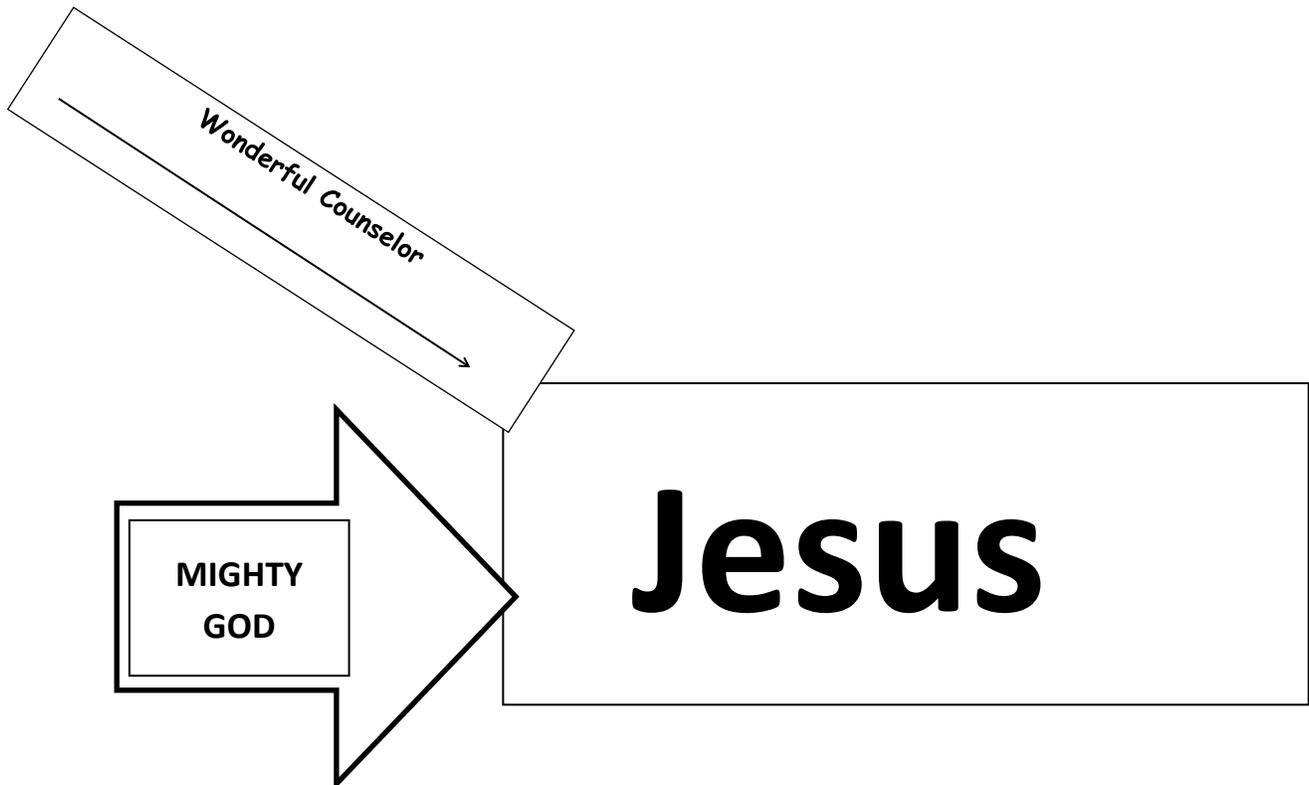
The whole Bible points to Jesus, sometimes in hidden ways, and sometimes in very obvious ways. In this passage God makes it very clear. Who is coming? (a son) How is he coming? (as a child) What will he be? (a king over all—"the government shall be on His shoulder") How long will he reign? (forever!)

Some things to think and talk about...

Mommies and daddies are very careful when they choose names for their children, and then they also give loving nicknames like honey bear, sweetheart, and sometimes funny names, too. But in this passage God shares some of the things that Jesus will be called. They aren't silly at all, but amazing. Talk about each of the names in verse 6 and what they mean.

Activity

Get out some construction paper. On one write the name "Jesus" and decorate it as you wish. On some other pieces write the other names listed in Isaiah 9:6 and decorate as nicely as you are able, but also include an arrow, or even cut the paper into an arrow. Tape everything up on a door, window, or use magnets to stick to your refrigerator. Have all the names point to Jesus, our Savior who has come!



Isaiah 11:1-5

¹ There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

³ And His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

He shall not judge by what His eyes see,
or decide disputes by what His ears hear,

⁴ but with righteousness He shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
and with the breath of His lips He shall kill the wicked.

⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of His waist,
and faithfulness the belt of His loins.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

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, O come, Thou Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes on Sinai's height,
In ancient times didst give the law
In cloud and majesty and awe.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave.

O come, Thou Dayspring from on high,
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.

O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heav'nly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.

12th century Latin text; 13th century tune

Isaiah gives us a picture of One who comes from the roots, the stump, the line of Jesse who was King David's father. One is coming on Whom the Spirit of the LORD will rest; He shall not judge by what His eyes see, or decide disputes by what His ears hear. It seems helpful to take a look at how these two very distant stories, that of Jesse and his son, David, and the story that Isaiah is pointing us to, the coming of the Christ, are related.

One particular area of note is how David was chosen as king. Take a look at 1 Samuel 16 and you will see the prophet Samuel obeying the Lord by going to Jesse's house to find "a king among his sons." Samuel is initially fearful and begins the process of selecting the king by looking for someone who is strong and stately and similar to Saul, the present king whom God has rejected. Is this not what those of Jesus' day were looking for to prove who was or was not the Messiah? Is this not often what we are looking for in a king or ruler or to prove Jesus as King? But God corrects Samuel quickly and notes, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature...for the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

Does this not clearly point us to "the fear of the LORD, an acknowledgment that He is right in all His ways? This One shall not bow to our expectations of "if He is God then He will bless or curse in the way I have determined is right and just." For, by the Spirit resting on Him (as declared in Luke 3:22), He sees the real heart issues, the reality of the situation, and therefore He rules from perfect understanding and justice and gives grace to the humble.

Do you remember the story of Hannah in 1 Samuel chapter 1, of Elisha and his servant in 2 Kings 6, of the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears, and of the man born blind in John chapter 9? This Advent Season, let us seek to fear the LORD and then to rule well as His people as we encounter the poor and the proud, the meek and the bullheaded, and all those whom He places in the way.

-David Shank

Main Ideas Made Simple

Do you remember when David was chosen king? First Samuel talked to the dad, Jesse, and looked at all the older seven sons. Surely one of these older, smart, good looking, strong young men should be King. But, no! God had chosen the young, rosy-cheeked shepherd boy. You see, God doesn't judge by what His eyes see, or decide arguments by what His ears hear.

Jesus comes from this family of Jesse and David. He was the new shoot growing off this old stump of the family tree. And like David, Jesus didn't look like the King of kings, but He was the chosen one! He came to judge and be merciful, and do what is right. He came to rule with the Spirit of the Lord resting on Him.

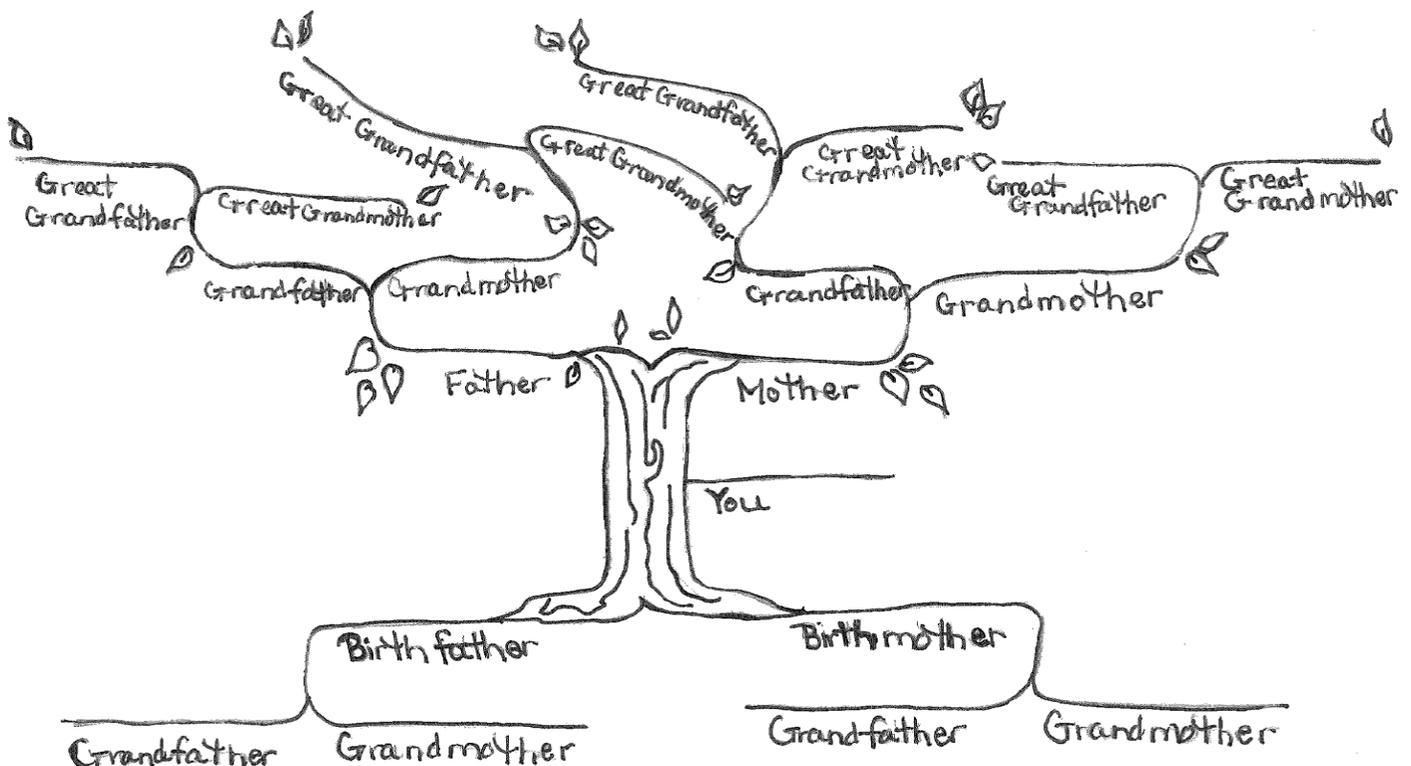
Some things to think and talk about...

Jesse had his son David, and many generations later, Jesus was born from this same family. Mary was a very young woman, and Joseph a carpenter. Why do you think God chose such a simple family to raise His Son? This Bible passage talks about Jesus being a righteous judge. What does that mean?

Activity

Just a few days ago we talked about family trees. Make your own family tree. You may use the one below, adding as many branches as necessary, or make your own. Talk as a family about each person you can remember. What were their strengths? Did they know Jesus? Were they kind? What did they teach you? How did God use them in your family's history? How is God using you in your family's history? Pray for people in in your family that don't yet know Jesus.

If you are adopted and know your birth family, you can make a two-sided family tree with you as the trunk, your adoptive family as the branches and your birth family as the roots. God chooses both our adoptive families and our birth families to work His in our lives.



Isaiah 40:1-5, 9

¹ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her

that her warfare is ended,

that her iniquity is pardoned,

that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

³ A voice cries:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;

make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up,

and every mountain and hill be made low;

the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

⁵ And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

⁹ Go on up to a high mountain,

O Zion, herald of good news;

lift up your voice with strength,

O Jerusalem, herald of good news;

lift it up, fear not;

say to the cities of Judah,

"Behold your God!"

God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen

God rest you merry, gentlemen,

Let nothing you dismay,

Remember Christ our Savior

Was born on Christmas Day,

To save us all from Satan's pow'r,

When we were gone astray;

O tidings of comfort and joy,

Comfort and joy,

O tidings of comfort and joy.

"Fear not then," said the angel,

"Let nothing you affright,

This day is born a Savior

Of a pure virgin bright,

To free all those who trust in Him

From Satan's pow'r and might."

O tidings of comfort and joy,

Comfort and joy,

O tidings of comfort and joy.

From God our Heav'nly Father,

A blessed Angel came;

And unto certain shepherds,

Brought tidings of the same:

How that in Bethlehem was born

The Son of God by Name.

O tidings of comfort and joy,

Comfort and joy,

O tidings of comfort and joy.

The message of the angel

One day would be fulfilled,

When on the cross of Calvary

The sinless Christ was killed,

And in three days He rose just as

The Father's love had willed.

O tidings of comfort and joy,

Comfort and joy,

O tidings of comfort and joy.

18th Century English carol

Third verse: Kirk Ward, New City Fellowship, St. Louis

In years gone by when I have heard this well-known and oft-sung carol, I unknowingly thought of "rest" as something I was supposed to do. It was my part and duty during the Christmas season. I am supposed to rest, meditate, and reflect on Christ during this time of year. While this is true, it is not what is being conveyed in the carol or the Isaiah passage.

It is "GOD rest ye." He is the giver of comfort, peace, and cessation of striving. God is the one who causes this to happen. He has done it by sending Christ to atone for our sin while we were yet sinners, thus breaking Satan's power. This fact is "news" (the old English rendering is "tidings") that brings us comfort and joy. Note how often the words "news," "call out," and "speak" are used in the Isaiah passage.

In our conversation this season, may we as His people be bold in calling out and speaking the name of Jesus, thus reminding those with whom we speak of the comfort and joy He brings to all who will call upon Him for salvation.

-Mike Marsh

Main Ideas Made Simple

Notice how often the words “news,” “call out,” and “speak” are used in this Bible passage. In our conversation this Christmas season, may we as God’s people be bold in calling out and speaking the name of Jesus. Let us remind those with whom we speak of the comfort and joy that Jesus brings to all who call on His name for salvation.

Some things to think and talk about...

Look carefully in this Bible passage. List some of the good news that you can share. What does it mean when it says, “and all flesh shall see it together?” What will they see?

Activity

Let’s do what this Bible passage says and proclaim the good news that Jesus has come!

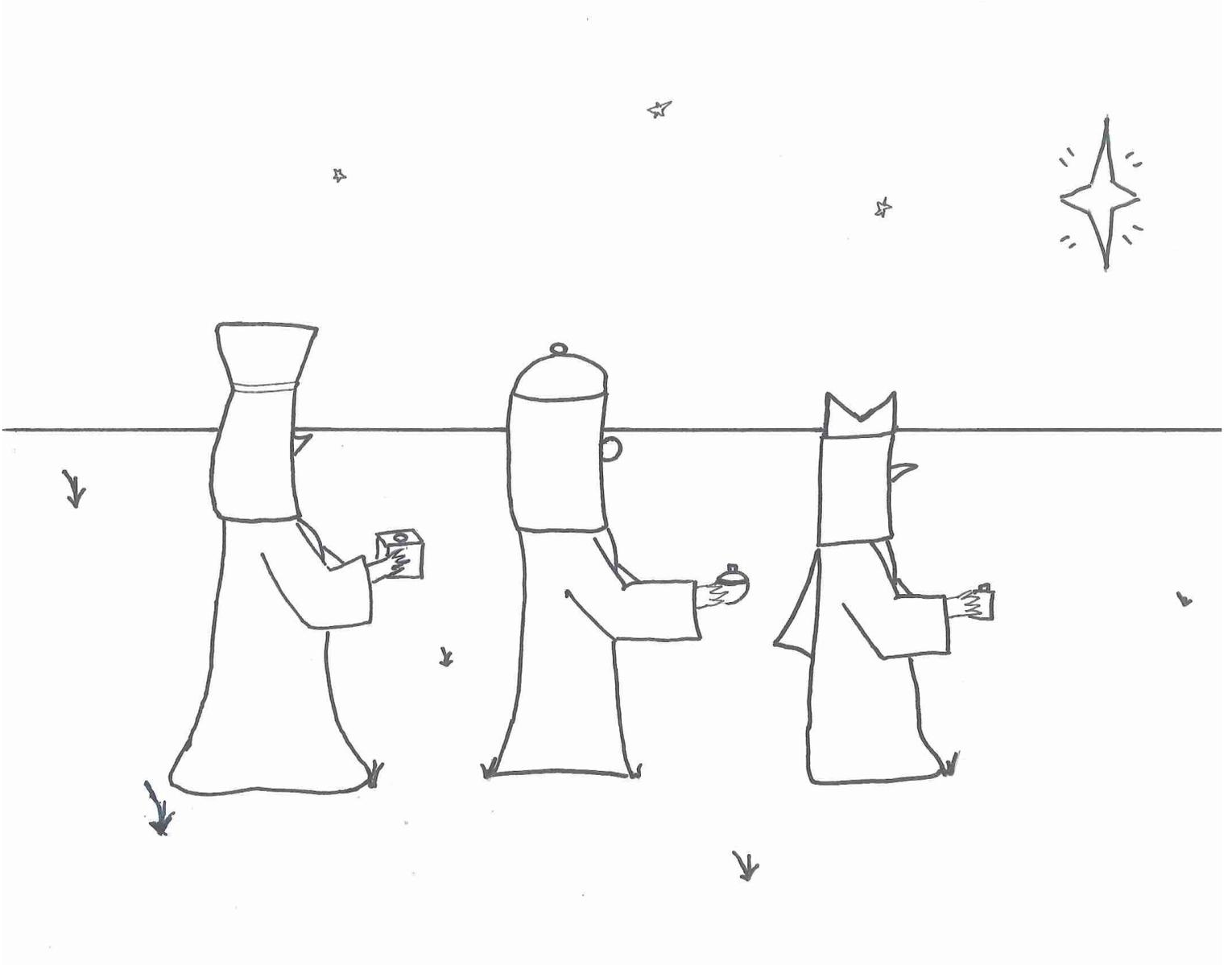
Get out the construction paper, scissors, markers, and glitter (if you dare!). Pull out your Bibles to find some great Bible verses to share and make some Christmas cards, but not just ones with pictures of Christmas trees and presents. Make sure these cards tell the good news that Jesus has come, and that God’s glory has been revealed!

Pray about to whom you should give these cards. Do you have a neighbor who doesn’t know Jesus, or a family member who needs encouraging? How about taking some cards that share the good news of Jesus to a nursing home?

Pray that Jesus will use this simple means of kindness to open up people’s hearts to Him.

For you to color...





138 Go, Tell It on the Mountain

Let them shout from the mountaintops. Let them give glory to the Lord. Isa. 42:11-12

Unison

Refrain: Go tell it on the moun-tain, O-ver the hills and ev-'ry-where;

Go tell it on the moun-tain That Je-sus Christ is born.

Fine

1. While shep-herds kept their watch-ing O'er si-lent flocks by night, Be-
 2. The shep-herds feared and trem-bled When, lo! a-bove the earth Rang
 3. Down in a low-ly man-ger The hum-ble Christ was born And

hold, through-out the heav-ens There shone a ho-ly light.
 out the an-gel cho-rus That hailed our Sav-ior's birth.
 God sent us sal-va-tion That bless-ed Christ-mas morn.

D.C.

Isaiah 60:1-3

¹ Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. ² For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.

³ And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Go Tell it on the Mountain

*Go tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and ev'rywhere;
Go tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born.*

While shepherds kept their watching
O'er silent flocks by night,
Behold, throughout the heavens
There shone a holy light.

The shepherds feared and trembled
When, lo! above the earth
Rang out the angel chorus
That hailed our Savior's birth.

Down in a lowly manger
The humble Christ was born
And God sent us salvation
That blessed Christmas morn.

*Text: Traditional Spiritual; stanzas written by John W. Work II
Music: Traditional Spiritual*



Most of us are familiar with a power outage. During a storm, a thunderstorm in the summer or a blizzard in the winter, the power goes out; no lights, no radio, nothing electric in the house is operational any longer. You depend on flashlights to get around at night, and maybe candles would be lit, or a camp lantern. And you wait for the power to be restored. The activities you are conditioned to doing are now limited. No TV, no stereo. Even cell phone use may be restricted because you didn't charge the battery. It may be some hours before the power is restored; or depending on the severity of the storm, it may be more than a day, sometimes extending to a week or longer.

And then the power comes back on, unannounced, expected but unexpected. "Hey, alright, we're back in business." There's relief. There's joy. You know that normalcy can return. Everybody is happy for the restoration. This is the picture of what Isaiah announces in the first verse, "Arise, shine; for your light has come." When you rise and shine, it is not because you are light, or you reflect light, it is because of the internal joy, the change in your demeanor, due to the light coming into your life. What you experience in your heart and in your expression because of a power outage and its restoration is a picture of what was to happen to the Israelites when the light would come to them.

In the Church we testify that Jesus is the light. This is what John claims in his gospel (1:4): "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." What Jesus gives to those who follow Him is not physical light, but His light does outshine the sun. It is spiritual light, light that can blind those who see it, as Paul on the road to Damascus was blinded when Jesus confronted him.

The result for us, for those on whom the light has come (amazingly, the light that comes from God is selective, unlike the light from the sun), we "rise and shine." Our demeanor is changed, we have joy because we are reconciled with the Father. We have peace with Him, and we have a hope for the future.

-Lyle Jacobsen

Main Ideas Made Simple

Have you ever had the electricity go out during a storm? All of the sudden things are very different. None of the lights work, you can't watch TV or videos, and the microwave doesn't work either! You might light candles and use flashlights to see. Sometimes the electricity comes back on pretty quickly, but other times it takes a very long time.

Then, suddenly the lights come back on! You were expecting the electricity to come back, but it is still kind of a surprise when it does. Everybody is happy! This is a little bit like the Bible verse for today when it says, "Arise, shine, for your light has come." Sin was a somewhat like a great big power outage making our lights go out, but Jesus came to restore the lights. Isaiah was telling the Israelites that soon the "lights of their lives" would be restored!

Yes, Jesus is the light, and those on whom the light has come "rise and shine." We have joy because we are reconciled with God the Father and have peace in Him and a hope for our future.

Some things to think and talk about...

What are some things that are hard to do without electricity? What are some things we can do because of electricity? Without Jesus we have no relationship with God. Talk about what life is like without a relationship with God. With Jesus we can have relationship with God! Talk about how different that makes life. What does it mean to be reconciled with God?

Activity

Get out some paper, a pencil, and scissors. Cut up some strips of paper, 2-3 strips per person in your family. On each strip write a simple object: cat, ice cream cone, bagel, toothbrush, guitar, book, etc. and fold the strips in half so no one else sees. Take turns picking a paper and drawing what is on the paper while everyone else guesses what is being drawn. Here's the trick. You have to draw without looking. You must be in complete darkness. So, either use a blindfold, or simply close your eyes. Take turns drawing and guessing.

It's pretty hard to draw without seeing, isn't it?

Without the light of Jesus, we are unable to do the things for which we are created. But Jesus has come as the light of the world! In Him we have all we need!

For you to color...



Jeremiah 33:14-16

¹⁴ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵ In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and He shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’”

Angels We Have Heard on High

Angels we have heard on high,
Sweetly singing o’er the plains,
And the mountains in reply
Echo back their joyous strains.

*Gloria in excelsis Deo,
Gloria in excelsis Deo.*

Shepherds, why this jubilee?
Why your joyous strains prolong?
Say what may the tidings be,
Which inspire your heav’nly song?

Come to Bethlehem and see
Him whose birth the angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee
Christ the Lord, the newborn King.

Traditional French Carol



The prophet Jeremiah isn’t known for his smiles and happy news, as he lived in the declining culture of Israel. This “weeping prophet” was used by his God to rebuke, admonish and warn the Jewish nation for their sin and its consequences before a holy God. But, like a warm cup of soup on a cold, damp December day, Jeremiah’s message here is extraordinarily upbeat. He’s under confinement for his previous salvos of judgment. Ahead of him is more severe imprisonment and even being thrown into a cistern. But this is a different message. Do you see the rays of hope? Can you sense the warmth of these promises in a spiritually frigid time? These are powerful words on their own, but in context, well, they might make some angels sing.

“Justice and righteousness,” in short supply at that time, will be the rule of the day. “Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely.” These words lift the spiritual chins of all who hear them. Who is the Agent of this change, the bodily fulfillment of these promises? He is “the righteous Branch,” the One Whose name is “The Lord is our righteousness.”

And how might the residents of Heaven respond to these words of divine guarantee? What could be their spontaneous reaction to salvation and justice and righteousness on Earth, starting with a newborn in Bethlehem? The angels sing. Of course they do. And so do we.

*“Gloria in excelsis Deo.”
Glory to God in the highest!*

-Steve Draper

...you will have the Lord for an everlasting light,
and the days of your mourning will be over.

Main Ideas Made Simple

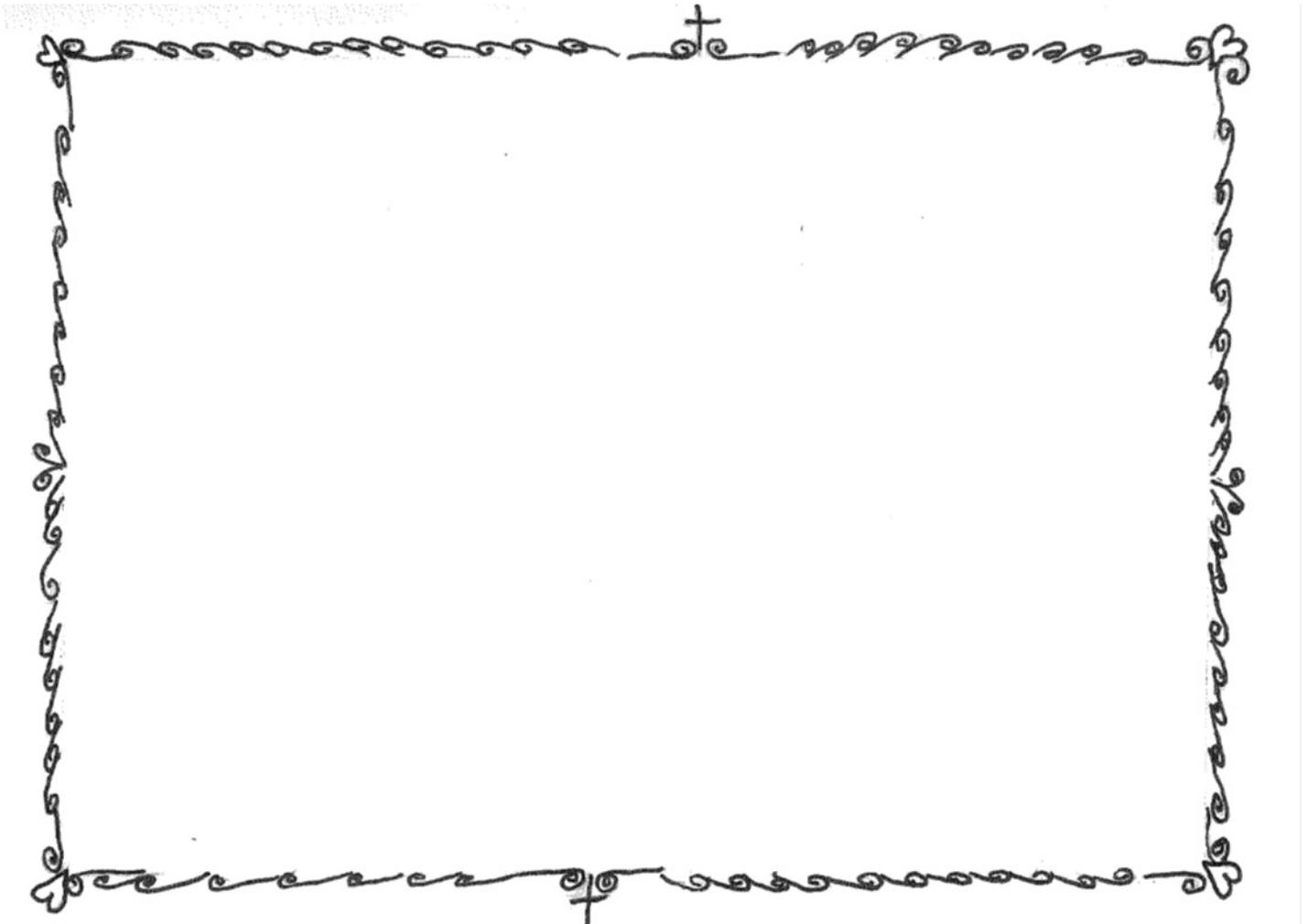
The prophet Jeremiah wasn't known for his smiles and happy news. Instead, he was used by God to warn the Jewish people of the great consequences of sin. You see, during this time in history, God's people were not following His ways. But this time Jeremiah is sharing a different message—he is sharing words of hope! The One Whose name is "The Lord of Righteousness" will change everything from despair to hope! He will send Jesus to rescue His people!

Some things to think and talk about...

Who is the righteous Branch that will bring justice and righteousness? Who will save Judah? How does this give us hope today? What does righteous mean? Why do we need someone to be our righteousness?

Activity

Make a sign that says, "The Lord is our righteousness." Have everyone in your family help to color and decorate it and to sign their name on it. Hang it up where you all will see it often. Next time you disobey and ask forgiveness, look at the sign. Remember that Jesus was perfect on your behalf. Use the space below to brainstorm or to sketch your ideas.



Matthew 1:1-17

¹ The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. ² Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³ and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴ and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵ and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷ and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, ⁸ and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, ⁹ and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰ and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, ¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. ¹² And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, ¹³ and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, ¹⁴ and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵ and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶ and 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.

Once in Royal David's City

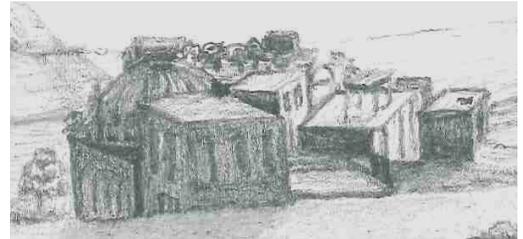
Once in royal David's city
Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her Baby
In a manger for His bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little Child.

He came down to earth from heaven
Who is God and Lord of all,
And His shelter was a stable,
And His cradle was a stall:
With the poor, and mean, and lowly
Lived on earth our Savior holy.

Jesus is our childhood's pattern,
Day by day like us He grew;
He was little, weak, and helpless,
Tears and smiles like us He knew:
And He feelth for our sadness,
And He shareth in our gladness.

And our eyes at last shall see Him
Thro' His own redeeming love;
For that Child so dear and gentle
Is our Lord in heav'n above,
And He leads His children on
To the place where He is gone.

Text: Cecil F. Alexander; Music: Henry J. Gauntlett



This genealogy connects the story of the Bible together. It acts as a bridge bringing all of the history of the Old Testament to bear as we meet Jesus in the New Testament.

This genealogy also connects our stories with the story of the Bible. In this family history, we find the heights of man's dignity and the depths of his depravity. We find that our story isn't so messed up that God can't use it or work through it. Our stories fit in because of God's sovereignty and His plan. We don't fit because we're good enough. We don't fit because our story is spectacular enough. We fit into God's plan because He has a plan and He has chosen to make us part of it. He is executing His plan through the good times and through the terrible times. He is still in control just as He was through the wonderfully godly kings and the evil kings in this list. He was still sovereign when David sinned so terribly with Bathsheba. He was still sovereign when Judah was deported to Babylon.

Therefore, take heart brothers and sisters. God is still sovereign when you are jobless. God is still sovereign when your marriage is strained to the point of breaking. God is still sovereign when your mind or your body betrays you and doesn't work like it is supposed to. God is still sovereign when those close to you—your children, your friend, your spouse, your mother, your father—let you down. His will and His plan were woven through the generations that you read about here, and His will and His plan are woven through your story as well.

Not only is He working His will, but He is with us. God in flesh, Jesus, knows the glory and the pain of living in the midst of the sovereign will of God. "Tears and smiles like us He knew..."

-Burruss McCombe

Main Ideas Made Simple

This passage from the Bible is a genealogy. A genealogy is much like a family tree. It says who the child is, then the grandchild, then the great grandchild, and then the great-great grandchild and on and on. This Bible passage tells who were Jesus's parents, and great-grandparents, and great-great grandparents. Some of the people had wonderful lives, others had terrible lives. But through the good and the bad times, God was always in control. Nothing could stop Jesus from being born!

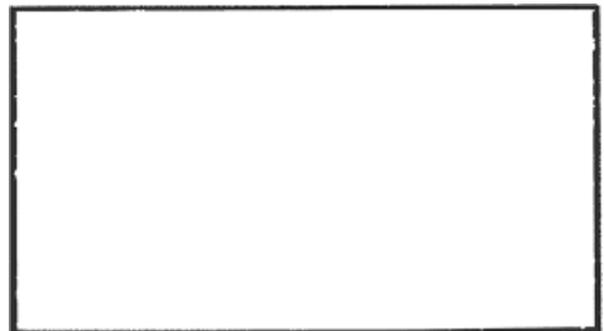
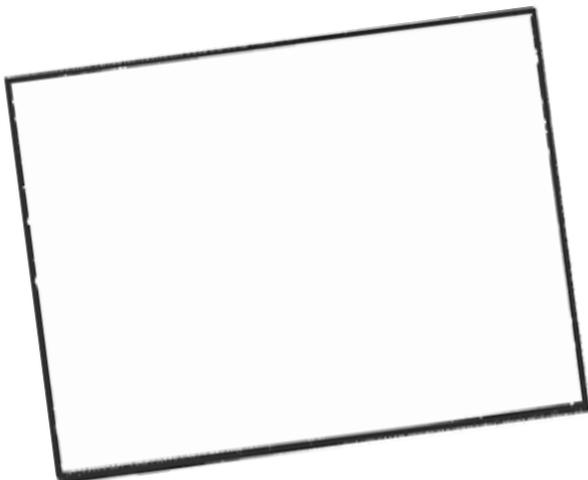
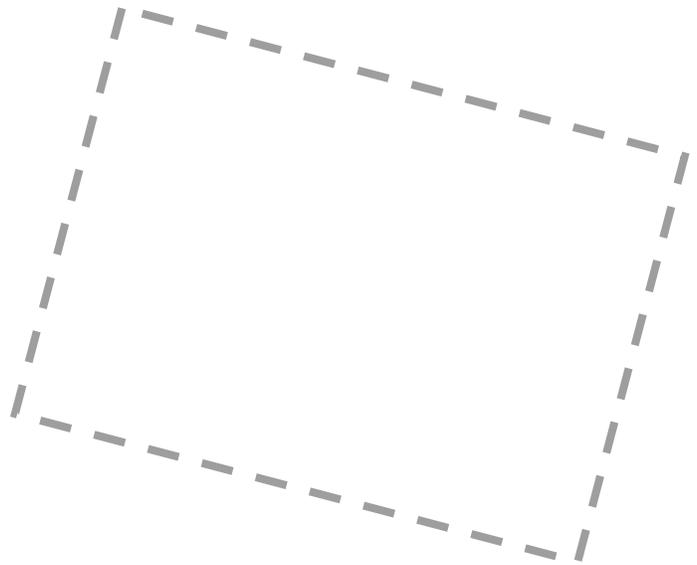
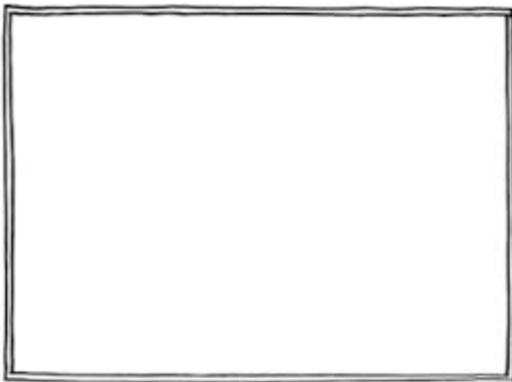
A special word for God's control is "sovereign." God is always sovereign and His plan will always come about. Just like nothing could stop Jesus from being born, nothing can stop God's plan for your life! Through hard things, good things, disappointments, and fun, God is always with you, and working in your life for your good and His glory.

Some things to think and talk about...

How is it comforting to know God is sovereign? Can anything stop God's plan for you and your family?

Activity

Get out the old family scrapbooks, picture albums, and videos. Talk about family memories of good times and hard times, too. Talk about how you can see God's plan unfolding for your family. Pray about the things that you still are waiting for Him to do.





Joy to the World! 125

Bethlehem . . . , out of you will come for Me One who will be ruler over Israel. Mic. 5:2

- 1. Joy to the world! the Lord is come; Let earth re - ceive her King;
- 2. Joy to the earth! the Sav - ior reigns; Let men their songs em - ploy;
- 3. No more let sins and sor - rows grow, Nor thorns in - fest the ground;
- 4. He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the na - tions prove

Let ev - 'ry heart pre - pare Him room,
 While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
 He comes to make His bless - ings flow
 The glo - ries of His righ - teous - ness,

And heav'n and na - ture sing, And heav'n and na - ture sing,
 Re - peat the sound - ing joy, Re - peat the sound - ing joy,
 Far as the curse is found, Far as the curse is found,
 And won - ders of His love, And won - ders of His love,

1. And heav'n and na - ture sing,

1. And heav'n and na - ture sing, And heav'n and na -

And heav'n, and heav'n and na - ture sing.
 Re - peat, re - peat the sound - ing joy.
 Far as, far as the curse is found.
 And won - ders, won - ders of His love.

ture sing,

Choral Ending on the following page.

TEXT: Isaac Watts
 MUSIC: George Frederick Handel, arranged by Lowell Mason;

ANTIOCH
 C.M.

Matthew 5:17-20

¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Come, Thou Long-expected Jesus

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art,
Dear Desire of ev'ry nation,
Joy of ev'ry longing heart.

Joy to those who long to see Thee,
Dayspring from on high, appear;
Come, Thou promised Rod of Jesse,
Of Thy birth we long to hear!
O'er the hills the angels singing news,
Glad tidings of a birth;
“Go to Him, your praises bringing;
Christ the Lord has come to earth.”

Come to earth to taste our sadness,
He whose glories knew no end;
By His life He brings us gladness,
Our Redeemer, Shepherd, Friend.
Leaving riches without number,
Born within a cattle stall;
This the everlasting wonder,
Christ was born the Lord of all.

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a king,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all-sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

*Text by Charles Wesley (1744) and Mark Hunt (1978)
Tune by R.H. Pritchard, 1855*

This passage is, at first blush, very frightening. Jesus warns us that if we break one jot or tittle of the law we are condemned. Thankfully, this passage also provides tremendous good news. Jesus informs us that He fulfills the law. One way He did this was by keeping the law perfectly (John 8:46).

Another way Jesus tells us that He fulfilled the law (Luke 24:25-27) is by actualizing all the prophets had foretold under the old covenant. Reading the prophets' writings from hundreds of years B.C., as they clearly anticipated Jesus' advent and work, we comprehend the phrase “long-expected Jesus” in the song above.

There is a third way Jesus fulfilled the law—by completely paying the penalty for our sins (the times we have broken the law). In Christ, through His shed blood, our sins are covered. Paul explains that we are crucified with Him that the body of sin might be destroyed (Romans 6:6-8). It is amazing that, implicit in today's Scripture, because of Jesus' advent, life, death and resurrection, our righteousness actually exceeds the scribes and Pharisees and we are permitted to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus tells us (Matthew 22:36-40) about the greatest law, “You shall love the Lord your God,” and the next greatest, to love our neighbors as ourselves. The season of Christmas reminds us of the sacrificial love that Jesus demonstrated by His advent, coming down from Heaven to save a fallen world. At this time of year, and always, let us cultivate and demonstrate this love—for our Lord and our neighbors. Intriguing, this is how we fulfill the law. “*He that loves another has fulfilled the law*” (Romans 13:8).

-Hal Baker

Main Ideas Made Simple

Wow! This is a little scary. Jesus warns us that even the tiniest bit of disobedience gets us in big trouble with God. And guess what? Every one of us has been at least a little bit bad at some point. It's a good thing that the Bible also tells us that Jesus fulfilled the law in three ways. First, He was able to keep the law of God perfectly. Second, every Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah was answered by Jesus. And finally, the Bible tells us that Jesus completely paid the penalty for our sins. For those who depend on Jesus, and accept His righteousness as their own, then their righteousness actually exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.

Some things to think and talk about...

How did Jesus show sacrificial love by keeping the law perfectly, fulfilling the prophecies, and giving us His righteousness? Is there anything that we can do to add to His righteousness?

Activity

List several good things you have done on a piece of paper. Now, think of one thing you have done wrong. Rip up your paper of good things. We cannot be saved by those good things! That one wrong thing undoes all the good. Throw the ripped paper away. You don't need a list of good things you have done! No, instead you just need to trust in Jesus! He has done the good work for us, that we couldn't do.





155 Once in Royal David's City

He will reign on David's throne. Isa. 9:7

1. Once in roy - al Da - vid's cit - y Stood a low - ly cat - tle
 2. He came down to earth from heav - en Who is God and Lord of
 3. Je - sus is our child-hood's pat - tern, Day by day like us He
 4. And our eyes at last shall see Him Thro' His own re - deem - ing

shed, Where a moth - er laid her Ba - by In a
 all, And His shel - ter was a sta - ble, And His
 grew; He was lit - tle, weak, and help - less, Tears and
 love; For that Child so dear and gen - tle Is our

man - ger for His bed: Ma - ry was that moth - er
 cra - dle was a stall: With the poor, and mean, and
 smiles like us He knew: And He feel - eth for our
 Lord in heav'n a - bove, And He leads His chil - dren

mild, Je - sus Christ her lit - tle Child.
 low - ly Lived on earth, our Sav - ior ho - ly.
 sad - ness, And He shar - eth in our glad - ness.
 on To the place where He is gone.

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David, ³³ and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Of the Father's Love Begotten

Of the Father's love begotten
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the Source, the Ending He,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see, evermore and evermore!

O ye heights of heav'n, adore Him;
Angel hosts, His praises sing;
All dominions, bow before Him
And extol our God and King;

Let no tongue on earth be silent,
Ev'ry voice in concert ring, evermore and evermore!
Christ, to Thee, with God the Father,
And O Holy Ghost, to Thee,
Hymn, and chant, and high thanksgiving,
And unwearied praises be,
Honor, glory, and dominion,
And eternal victory, evermore and evermore!

Text: Aurelius Prudentius Music: Plainsong, 12th cent.

What kind of greeting had Mary received from the angel Gabriel? This was a unique greeting because it was both terrifying and grace-filled. We know it was terrifying because of Mary's response, for we are told, "Mary was greatly troubled at his words..." Furthermore, the angel reassures her and says, "Do not be afraid Mary, you have found favor with God."

But we also know that it was a grace-filled greeting by its content. For the angel says, "you are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Indeed, the announcement by the angel is astounding beyond words. Certainly, Mary could not have fully understood the angel's pronouncement at that time. How could she? The angel tells her that she would give birth to a son whom she would name Jesus. "Jesus" means "God is salvation." How could Mary have possibly understood that she would give birth to the God Who is salvation? How can we grasp this? Only by faith!

He would be great and be called the Son of the Most High. He would take the throne of David, reign over God's people forever, and establish a kingdom that would never end. These were promises that her people, the people of Israel, had been taught for generation after generation since the time of their greatest king, David. And now the fulfillment of all these promises would be growing in her womb as the Holy Spirit came upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowed her, though she was yet a virgin.

This would be God's work from beginning to end. How could Mary have possibly understood this? Indeed, she could not. In fact, she would continue to grow in her understanding of this announcement the rest of her life.

We, too, need to be awestruck by this announcement. For He is Jesus, "God is salvation!" We can only know Him as Savior and Lord if we trust that His life, sacrificial death, and resurrection are our only hope. Apart from Him we cannot stand before a holy, holy, holy God. Indeed, He is not like us, for He is fully God! Indeed, He is just like us, for He took on flesh! He is the fulfillment of every promise that God made to redeem a people for Himself. As the one who sits on David's throne, He is God's chosen king; therefore, He is also the King of kings and Lord of lords. Our only response can be to worship this promised Savior! Bow down and worship Him, for He alone is worthy!

-Larry Chico

Main Ideas Made Simple

How could Mary possibly understand all that the angel Gabriel was telling her? How could she believe that she was going to have a baby that would be God's own Son, and her baby would be the God Who is salvation? It was only by faith that she could begin to believe anything so amazing!

Through all of her childhood she had heard of God's promise to rescue His people. She had heard the Messiah would come and establish a kingdom without end. Now this baby, the baby that would grow inside of her, would be this great King! There was NO WAY she could understand all of what God would do through her baby.

We, too, need to be amazed at this announcement from the angel Gabriel. "God is salvation!" Just like Mary, it is by faith that we believe and trust in Jesus. By faith we believe that His death and resurrection is our hope of salvation.

Jesus: not like us because He is fully God.

Jesus: just like us because He was fully man.

Jesus: King of kings, Lord of Lord, promised Savior!

By faith we believe, and upon believing we respond with worship and praise for He is worthy!

Some things to think and talk about...

The things that Gabriel told Mary seemed impossible! She must have wondered how she could have a baby without a husband and how could this baby be God's Son.

What does it mean to believe something "by faith"? From where does faith come? Why do we need faith to worship the Lord?

Activity

Children, don't read this—it will spoil the activity!

Let your grown-up read it first.

Blind fold your child and carefully direct him or her around the room. Instruct him or her to not put hands out in front or feel around, just listen and trust. Say you are going to give the command to sit down, but he or she is not allowed to feel if there is anything to sit on, he just needs to trust you. As you are explaining this, very quietly bring out a chair or stool and position it so he will be able to sit in it. Remember, when your child started, there was no chair to sit in, so he doesn't know if there will be one now!

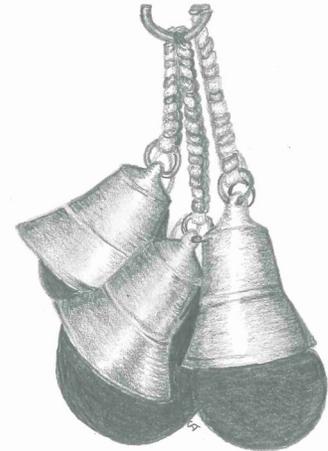
This gives a small example of faith. Your child could not see the chair, but because they know you and trust you, they believed what they could not see.

Romans 10:17 says that, "...faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." As we read the Bible, we come to know Christ more, we hear His Word, our faith is built!



Luke 1:39-45

³⁹In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴²and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”



Joy to the World!

Joy to the world! The Lord is come:
Let earth receive her King;
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n 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,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, 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,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, 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,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders of His love.

Text by Isaac Watts, based on Psalm 98. Music by G. F. Handel; arr. Lowell Mason, 1836

Relatives visit each other, right? Surely you have fond memories of going with your parents to visit your grandparents, your aunts and uncles, and your cousins. My wife tells me of the long trips her family took from Virginia to Michigan to visit her mother's sisters and brothers and cousins.

Mary was pregnant with Jesus when she decided to visit her relative Elizabeth in a town of Judah located in the mountains. The same angel who had announced to Mary that she would conceive a child by the Holy Spirit also informed her that her relative, Elizabeth, who had been called barren, was now in her sixth month of pregnancy. Mary knew firsthand that, as the angel had said, "... nothing will be impossible for God." We know that as well! But when we have the opportunity to actually see it, we are amazed!

Mary entered the city and went to Zechariah's house. Two incredible things were about to happen here. When Mary arrived, she greeted Elizabeth, and at the sound of her voice, the baby leaped in her womb! We know that babies move, but this must have been such a great movement that Luke describes it as a leap. And secondly, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. The writer does not give us more details regarding how this looked or how it was known. However, perhaps one way we can see that she was full of the Holy Spirit was that Elizabeth immediately began to glorify Christ—she blesses Jesus right there in Mary's womb and calls Him "My Lord." Elizabeth goes on to say that the reason her baby leaped was "for joy." This baby was John the Baptist who would call the people to repentance and announce the coming of the Son of God.

Elizabeth calls Mary blessed because of the privilege of being the woman chosen by God for the coming of the promised Messiah, and above all, because Mary believed: "blessed is she who believed." In the same way, you and I, we are blessed because we have also believed in Jesus, the Son of God who saves His people from their sins.

-Jacinto Hernandez

Main Ideas Made Simple

Relatives visit each other, right? Sometimes they even take long trips in order to see each other's faces and give each other a hug. This is what Mary did. When Gabriel the angel told Mary all about Jesus, he also told her about another miracle. Her relative, Elizabeth, who had always wanted to have a baby, but couldn't, was now pregnant in her old age! In fact, Gabriel had said, "...nothing will be impossible for God." And although we all know that God can do anything, when we actually get to see Him do the impossible we are amazed!

So, Mary went to see Elizabeth and two incredible things happened. First, when Elizabeth heard Mary's voice call out a greeting, her baby leaped inside of her; and second, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and immediately began to glorify Christ Jesus. Elizabeth worshiped Jesus, even though He was still inside of Mary waiting to be born!

Elizabeth called Mary blessed because God had chosen her to be the mother of Jesus, and also because Mary had faith to believe. Guess what? We are also blessed when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ who saves His people from their sins!

Some things to think and talk about...

List some of the miracles that we hear about in this passage. Why do you think Mary wanted to go visit Elizabeth? What did Elizabeth do when she was filled with the Holy Spirit? Was Jesus God even when He had not yet been born?

Activity

Mary and Elizabeth encouraged one another in the Lord during their visit together. Make Christmas cards to send to some of your relatives or family-like friends. Include words of praise for what God has done this past year as well as words of encouragement for them in this year to come. Before popping these cards in the mail, pray for God to bless the people to whom you send them.

For you to color...



Luke 1:46-55

⁴⁶ And Mary said,
“My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call
me blessed;
⁴⁹ for He who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is His name.
⁵⁰ And His mercy is for those who fear Him
from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with His arm;
He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
⁵² He has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich He has sent away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped His servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

Tell Out, My Soul

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;
Tender to me the promise of His Word;
In God my Savior shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by.
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
The hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His name!
Make known His might, the deeds His arm has done;
His mercy sure, from age to age the same;
His holy name, the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of His Word!
Firm is His promise, and His mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
To children's children and forevermore!

Timothy Dudley-Smith and Walter Greatore ©1962 Hope Publishing Co. CCLI #353794

Luke recounts the visit made to Mary by her older cousin who was herself with child (John the Baptist). As Elizabeth approached Mary, the child within her leapt for joy. It is a remarkable moment. Even in the darkness of the womb, testimony to the Christ is given. After words of blessing spoken by Elizabeth, Mary breaks into song. Often referred to as “The Magnificat,” the song of Mary is both praise and prophecy.

Mary’s song is filled with Scripture and allusions to Scripture. Remember that she is a teenaged girl. And while it is true that Mary was an ordinary sinner in need of a Savior just like all of us, it is nevertheless clear that she was a godly young woman. She knows and has treasured in her heart the Word of God so that in trial and blessing what springs forth from her is God’s Word.

Mary also demonstrates remarkable humility. This is evident not only in the words of her song but also in her disposition toward God’s plans. She expresses trust and even thankfulness despite the danger she is in.

Have you ever considered this? Mary is a young teenage girl in a culture where people who commit adultery are stoned to death. And she is betrothed, that is engaged, to a respectable Jewish man. And without yet having intimate physical contact with him, she becomes pregnant. The entire scenario is fraught with danger for young Mary. This danger is not only the physical threat that could come by way of stoning. But her reputation, her family’s name, her father’s honor are all jeopardized by God’s plan for her.

There is yet more danger. Since the promise to the woman that from her offspring would come the One to redeem His people, Satan had worked to stamp out the seed of Eve’s sons. Mary knew the Old Testament Scriptures. She was not ignorant concerning the evil hatred of Satan against God, His people, and their Messiah. So to bear this One, Who would accomplish full and final redemption, would be spiritually costly.

So Mary’s, “My soul magnifies the Lord” is a declaration of profound trust in the unshakable goodness of God. She has received the Lord’s dangerous will as a precious blessing. In this, she has valued as more precious than her life and reputation the Lord’s glory and His redemptive plan. What a model of faith is Mary for we who live under the reign of God’s mercy in Jesus.

-Todd Pruitt

Main Ideas Made Simple

After Elizabeth spoke her words of blessing, Mary responded by breaking into a beautiful song of praise and prophecy. This very special song has a fancy name, “The Magnificat.” Mary was an ordinary sinner, in need of a Savior—just like us. But, we can tell from her amazing song that she had stored up God’s word in her heart. In this time of blessing and hardship, God’s word is what came pouring from her lips.

You may understand that this was a time of blessing, but are you surprised that it was also a time of hardship? Think about this. Mary was just a young teenaged girl, not married, but pregnant. She was engaged to Joseph, but Joseph was not the baby’s father. Do you think most people would think that she was pregnant by a miracle? I don’t think so... Her honor and the honor of her family could be ruined! Not only that, but Mary knew the evil hatred of Satan against God, His people, and their Messiah. Inside of her she was carrying this very Messiah! She might have been tempted to be afraid!

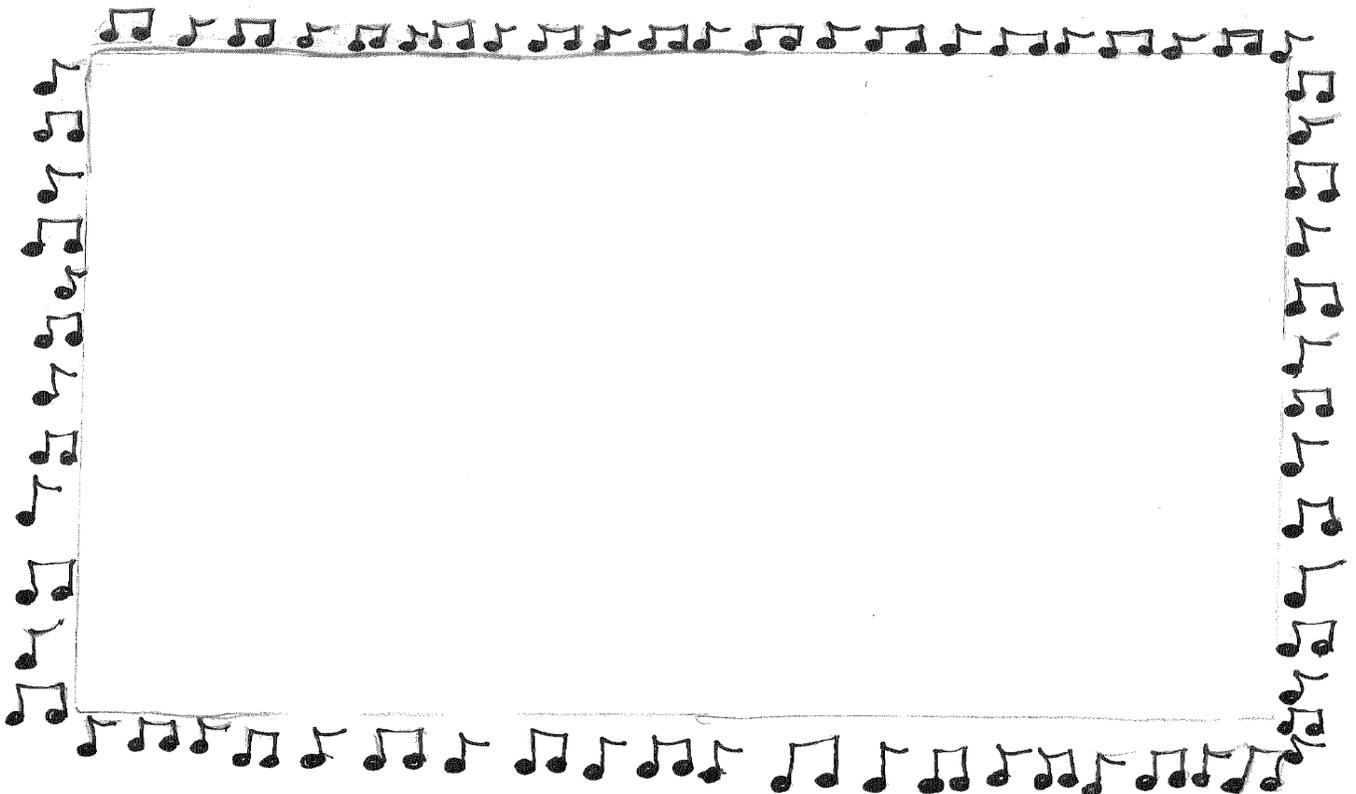
Instead, she trusted the Lord in the middle of it all. She sang praise! She accepted the dangerous path. God’s glory was more precious to her than her reputation or life.

Some things to think and talk about...

What were some of the feelings Mary might have had? How do we know she loved God’s glory more than anything else?

Activity

Talk about blessings and hardships in your own family. In the box below write a song, or poem, or sentences of praise for God that He would work in your family and through your family for His glory. Like Mary used Truths from God’s Word, use ideas from some of your favorite scriptures to praise God.



Philippians 2:6-11

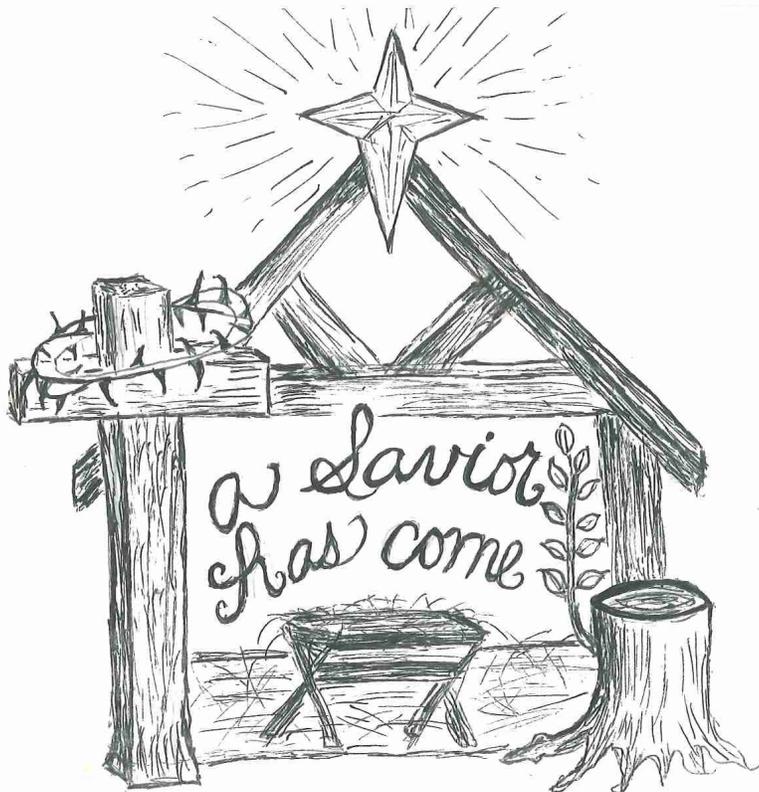
⁶Who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Thou Who Was Rich Beyond All Splendor

Thou who was rich beyond all splendor,
All for love's sake became poor;
Thrones for a manger Thou did surrender,
Sapphire paved courts for stable floor.
Thou who was rich beyond all splendor,
All for love's sake became poor.
All for love's sake became poor.

Thou who art God beyond all praising,
All for love's sake became man;
Stooping so low, But sinners raising,
Heav'n-ward by Thine eternal plan.
Thou who art God beyond all praising,
All for love's sake became man.
All for love's sake became man.

Thou who art love beyond all telling,
Savior and King, we worship Thee.
Emmanuel within us dwelling,
Make us what Thou would have us to be.
Thou who art love beyond all telling,
Savior and King, we worship Thee.
Savior and King, we worship Thee.



Words: Frank Houghton, 1934 ©Overseas Missionary Fellowship
Music: Burruss McCombe, 2008

It's easy to become self-centered, especially in the hustle and bustle surrounding the Christmas holiday. Our attention more often turns to the gifts we desire, places we want to go, or things we have to do. Yet, as our focus turns to the birth of our Savior, we are reminded that "He emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:7-8).

In His ministry with the disciples, Jesus reminded them that a slave is not greater than his master; neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him (John 13:16). This Jesus, Who is God beyond all praising, all for love's sake became poor. How then can our lives be anything less? In our celebration of the birth of our Lord, may our hearts turn toward our calling and be worthy of the gospel as we walk in the same manner as He walked (1 John 2:6).

Let our attitude throughout the holiday take on Jesus's words, "But I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27). May our witness be evident in our love for one another and "not to look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interest of others" (Philippians 2:4). Lord, make us what Thou would have us to be, Savior and King, we worship Thee.

-Ken Van Sickle

Main Ideas Made Simple

It's Christmas time! Isn't it easy to get a little self-centered as you think of the gifts you want to get, the places you want to go, the cookies you hope to eat, and the fun Christmas-y things you want to do? But now is the time to turn our focus to Jesus instead. Jesus humbled himself by becoming obedient and willing to die on the cross. As we celebrate this Christmas season, let us be thankful and remember that God has called us His own. Let our attitude throughout the holiday be an example of Jesus's words, "I am among you as one who serves." (Luke 22:27) Yes, instead of being self-centered this Christmas, let us ask Jesus to make us be what He would have us to be, and we will worship Him, our Savior and King.

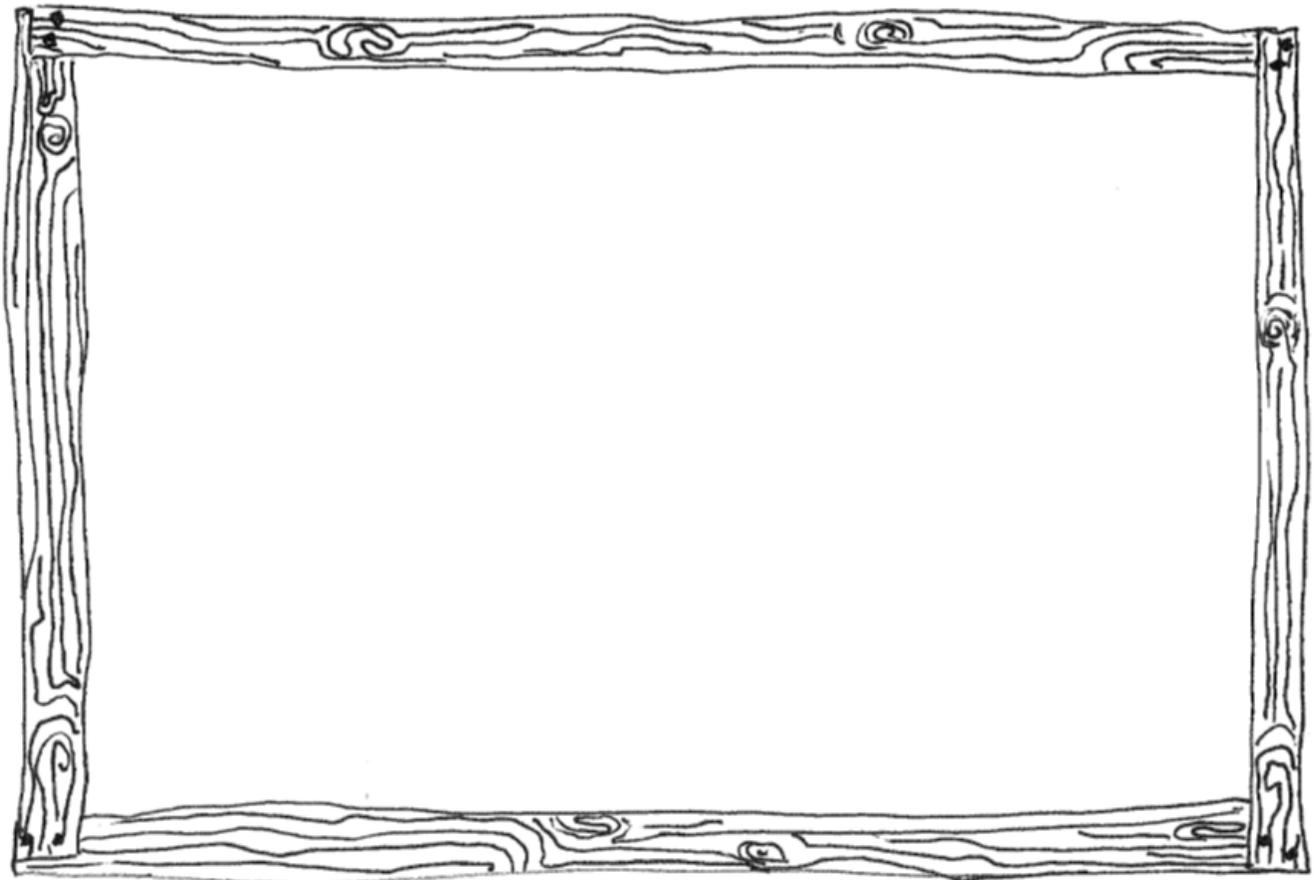
Some things to think and talk about...

Why was it so important that God come to us in human form? Why would that be considered "humbling" for God? What are some ways we can serve each other this Christmas season?

Activity

Think about serving. Who could you serve as a family? Do you know someone who needs some yard work done, or some errands done, or a meal? Maybe someone just needs a visit or encouragement.

Brainstorm as a family one or two people who have a very specific need that you could meet. Make plans to meet that need. Isn't it exciting to serve others?!



Matthew 1:18-24

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...

What Child Is This?

What Child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary!

Why lies He in such mean estate,
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.

Nails, spear, shall pierce Him through;
The cross be borne for me, for you:
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh;
Come, peasant, king, to own Him;
The King of kings salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.
Raise, raise the song on high,
The virgin sings her lullaby:
Joy, joy for Christ is born,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

Text: Traditional English Carol; Tune: 16th Century English melody

The birth of Jesus was SCANDALOUS! It has been over 2000 years since the birth of Christ, and we know from history the events surrounding His life, death, and resurrection. Imagine yourself back in that time, not knowing what you know now. It would have been a huge scandal in the community! Women could be stoned in that day for such a thing! Yet, the Lord chose to use this method to bring Immanuel to us.

Put yourself in Mary's shoes. You have been told by an angel that you are going to have a baby conceived by the Holy Spirit, and then you tell your fiancé. His response was probably along the lines of, "Yeah, right," or "No way," but, "being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly." Joseph is then visited in a dream by an angel who confirms to him what is taking place.

Joseph's response after the dream is telling of his faith and character. The Scripture says, "He took his wife" meaning he believed the angel, and Mary would become his wife. End of discussion. As you can imagine, they were both then subjects of the scandal. All this took place so that the Scripture, "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means 'God with us') would be fulfilled.

-Gary Shickel



Main Ideas Made Simple

Joseph must have been so confused and sad when Mary first told him that she was going to have a baby. He knew that it always takes a man and a woman for a baby to be born, and he knew that he had not been with Mary in that very special way; they were not even married yet. How could he possibly believe her when she told him that it was a miracle of God that she was going to have a baby? “No,” he must have thought, “that was impossible.” So he decided to break off their engagement, but quietly, so as to avoid further embarrassment to Mary and himself.

But then an angel visited Joseph in a dream telling him that what Mary had said was all true. Joseph was a man of faith and character. We can tell because he believed the angel, and he took Mary as his wife and cared for her.

All this took place so that the Scripture would be fulfilled: “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means ‘God with us’).”

Some things to think and talk about...

How can you tell that Joseph was a kind man? How did Joseph show faith? (For those ready to deal with this more mature idea: Why would it be embarrassing and even dangerous for Mary and Joseph for her to be pregnant?)

Activity

Now both Mary and Joseph knew that they needed to prepare for the arrival of baby Jesus. In the box below list some of the things they would need to do to be ready for baby. It’s pretty much the same list that any baby would need, isn’t it? Remember, Jesus was fully man. He had the same needs that any other baby would have, but by faith Joseph and Mary believed their baby was also fully God!



Luke 2:1-7

¹In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴And 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, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷And 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.

Who Is This So Weak and Helpless?

Who is this, so weak and helpless,
Child of lowly Hebrew maid,
Rudely in a stable sheltered,
Coldly in a manger laid?
'Tis the Lord of all creation,
Who this wondrous path has trod;
He is Lord from everlasting,
And to everlasting God.

Who is this, a Man of Sorrows,
Walking sadly life's hard way,
Homeless, weary, sighing, weeping
Over sin and Satan's sway?
'Tis our God, our glorious Savior,
Who above the starry sky
Is for us a place preparing,
Where no tear can dim the eye.

Who is this? Behold him shedding
Drops of blood upon the ground!
Who is this, despised, rejected,
Mocked, insulted, beaten, bound?
'Tis our God, Who gifts and graces
On His church is pouring down;
Who shall smite in holy vengeance
All His foes beneath His throne.

Who is this that hangs there dying
While the rude world scoffs and scorns,
Numbered with the malefactors,
Torn with nails, and crowned with thorns?
'Tis our God Who lives forever
Mid the shining ones on high,
In the glorious golden city,
Reigning everlastingly

Text: William Walsham Howe; Music: Christopher Miner

“And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger.”

Since as early as Genesis 3 and through many other later prophecies, the birth of Jesus foretold, the eternal son of God becoming man, serves as the greatest miracle in the history of the world.

*“Tis the Lord of all creation,
Who this wondrous **path** has trod;”*

As the account (or path) in Luke begins, it appears that a decree or law would force Mary and Joseph to travel to the lowly and obscure town of Bethlehem to be registered or counted for taxation purposes, but we know from Scripture (Micah 5:2) that God, the controller of all history, has specifically ordained Joseph to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home, since he was a descendant of King David. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee and took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was obviously pregnant by this time. Now we also know from Scripture that this was no ordinary pregnancy, but rather through the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit by virgin birth. Once again, Scripture (Isaiah 7:14) written back in the eighth century, foretells this amazing event.

What a path indeed that our God chose to take to move toward us for His glory! What a blessing for us that our God documents His promises and story throughout Scripture. Glory to God in the highest!

-Greg Becker

Main Ideas Made Simple

There are many miracles spoken of in the Bible, but the greatest miracle of all is that Jesus, the eternal Son of God became man in order to rescue mankind.

Today's song has a line in it that says,

"Tis the Lord of all creation, Who this wondrous path has trod;"

We can follow the unfolding of the greatest miracle like a path throughout the Bible, the prophecies as sign posts leading us on. As soon as sin first enters the world, God speaks in Genesis, telling us that there is a hope to come.

We know that Mary and Joseph were forced to travel to Bethlehem in order to pay their taxes to the government. The Old Testament book of Micah tells us that this would happen. And we know that Mary's pregnancy is a miracle, not just from the visit of Gabriel, but also from a prophecy in Isaiah written long before. It a glorious map, with the promises made to us in the Old Testament, and the pathway to the promises answered in Jesus whose story is told to us in the New Testament. What a blessing that God would make it so clear to us! What an amazing path that God chose to take, moving toward us for His Own glory!

Some things to think and talk about...

Why is it so important to know that every Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah was answered in Jesus? Would it matter if one of the Old Testament prophecies was not answered? How would these prophecies have been a comfort to Mary and Joseph? What are some promises that have been made to you? How did you feel when they were answered?

Activity

Draw a map of the path that shows the story of Jesus. Here is an example, but you should make it your own design! First brainstorm what events you would like to include, and then figure out how to draw it out. For fun, you could draw it on a brown grocery bag, or tan paper, and crinkle it up and then smooth it out when you finish drawing to make it look "ancient."



193

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him. Hab. 2:20

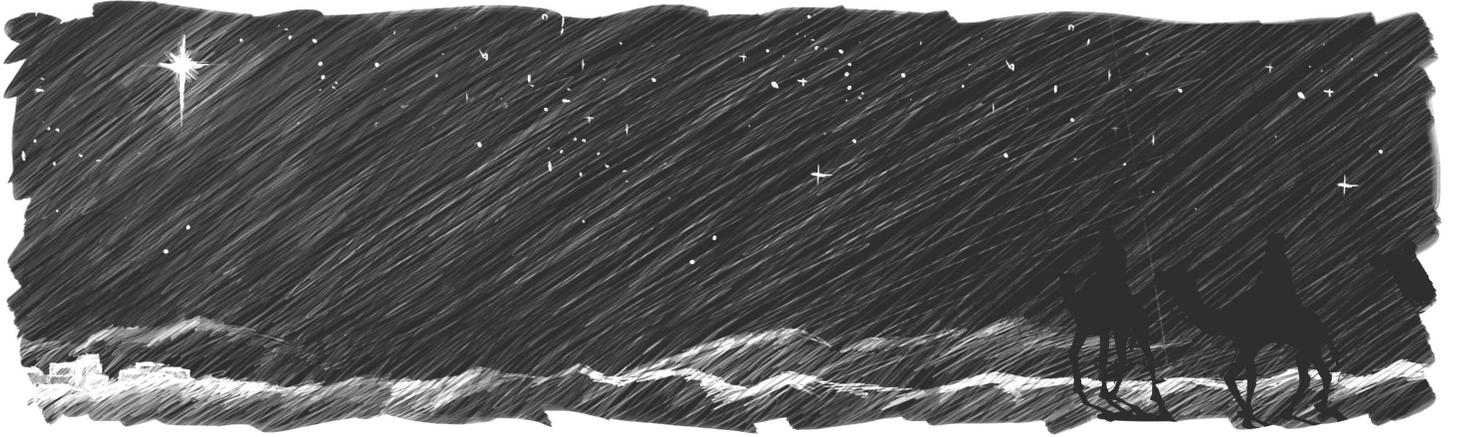
Unison

1. Let all mor - tal flesh keep si - lence, and with fear and
 2. King of kings, yet born of Mar - y, as of old on
 3. Rank on rank the host of heav - en spreads its van - guard
 4. At his feet the six - winged ser - aph; cher - u - bim, with

trem - bling stand; pon - der noth - ing earth - ly - mind - ed,
 earth he stood, Lord of lords, in hu - man ves - ture,
 on the way, as the Light of light de - scend - eth
 sleep - less eye, veil their fac - es to the pres - ence,

for with bless - ing in his hand, Christ our God to
 in the bod - y and the blood, he will give to
 from the realms of end - less day, that the pow'rs of
 as with cease - less voice they cry, "Al - le - lu - ia,

earth de - scend - eth, our full hom - age to de - mand.
 all the faith - ful his own self for heav'n - ly food.
 hell may van - ish as the dark - ness clears a - way.
 al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, Lord Most High!"



John 1:9-13

⁹The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. ¹¹He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. ¹²But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
And with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly-minded,
For with blessing in His hand,
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
Our full homage to demand.

King of kings, yet born of Mary,
As of old on earth He stood,
Lord of lords in human vesture,
In the body and the blood,
He will give to all the faithful
His own self for heav'nly food

Rank on rank the host of heaven
Spreads its vanguard on the way,
As the Light of light descendeth
From the realms of endless day,
That the pow'rs of hell may vanish
As the darkness clears away.

At His feet the six-winged seraph;
Cherubim with sleepless eye,
Veil their faces to the Presence,
As with sleepless voice they cry,
"Alleluia, alleluia,
Alleluia Lord Most High!"

*Words: Liturgy of St. James, tr. Gerard Moultrie;
Music: 17th century French melody*

"I didn't know, really, I didn't know," said the scared little boy as the tiny shed behind his home collapsed in flames. This is a lack of information—that playing with matches in a storage shed housing gas-driven machines might lead to conflagration. For him, you teach and train, confirming the link between fire and flammables. But in these powerful verses from John 1, we learn that a lack of information was not the problem.

"The true light, which gives light to everyone was coming into the world." But it is even better—"He was in the world, ..." "He came to His own, ..." John says "the true light" is the One through Whom the world was made (vs 10). And we learn that this was the One and only Son in verse 14. Letting Scripture interpret Scripture, Paul informs us that "by Him all things were created ... all things were created by Him and for Him." (Colossians 1:16) So, there it is. All the information we need to understand.

But hear what else our passage tells us: "... yet the world did not know Him, ... and His own people did not receive Him." This moves beyond "I didn't know" to "I refuse to believe." That is a whole different problem—rejection of the truth, a refusal to believe. And the bad news is that each of us has lived in that camp. Heaven's judicial court would find us guilty. And then God stepped in.

With Jesus coming to us as a man, God has provided an extraordinary alternative. There are actually people who DO "receive Him." The folks who believe in His name and receive Him have an astounding change. Do they get to become good people, rich people, well-respected people? The nicest folks in the neighborhood? Nobel Peace Prize winners? Better than that—they get "to become children of God." And just before we start exalting them, puffing up their pride, John is very clear—these folks don't get this believing and receiving through family lineage or a spiritual boot-strap effort. They were born of God—His plan, His work.

Is it any wonder that we are silent at times before the Creator Savior as we celebrate His arrival in Bethlehem?

-Steve Draper

Main Ideas Made Simple

Sometimes we just don't know something. There is no shame in that. We just need to be taught. Once we have been taught, then we can know and understand.

Today's verse tells us, "...yet the world did not know Him...and His own people did not receive Him." Oh, this is very sad. God's people had been instructed and taught, yet refused to know. This is a very different problem indeed. Everyone who has heard the truth, but chooses not to believe, is guilty of sin. But God stepped in! God had a plan. He sent Jesus so that people could "receive Him" by believing. It would be God's work in us allowing us to believe.

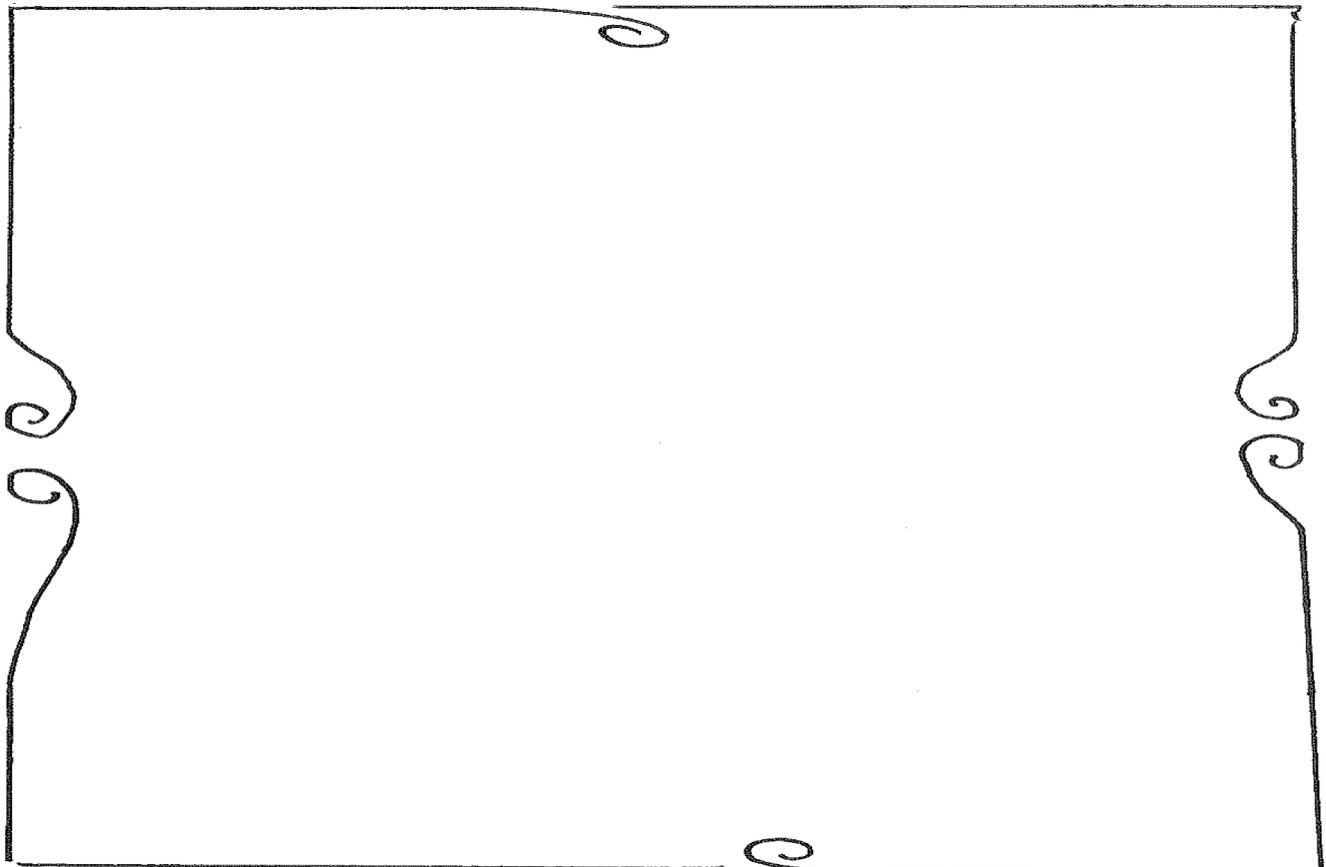
It's so amazing that sometimes, as today's song suggests, we just keep silent considering what could have happened if we had to stand before God guilty of unbelief and rejoicing that He has rescued us.

Some things to think and talk about...

What do you think is the difference between not knowing something and knowing it, but refusing to believe? What are the consequences of refusing to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Activity

Take a minute or two to be silent as you think about all that God, by the work of the Holy Spirit, and through His Son, has done for you. Draw some of your thoughts below.



Luke 2:8-20

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased." ¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks

While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around,
And glory shone around

"Fear not!" said he; for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled mind,
"Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To you and all mankind,
To you and all mankind."

"To you, in David's town this day,
Is born of David's line,
The Savior Who is Christ the Lord,

And this shall be the sign:
And this shall be the sign."

"The heav'nly Babe you there shall find
To human view displayed,
All meanly wrapped in swaddling bands,
And in a manger laid;
And in a manger laid."

"All glory be to God on high,
And to the earth be peace:
Good will henceforth from heav'n to men,
Begin and never cease,
Begin and never cease."

Text: Nahum Tate. Music: George Frederick Handel

At times I find myself having trouble believing in miracles. God's Word tells us about a spiritual, supernatural dimension of the universe quite different from the physical world that so clogs our senses. While in our eyes these dimensions or realms seem to be quite different and remote from each other, they are together in God's eyes. He created them both. It is intriguing that Scripture uses exactly the same word for the physical heaven (sky, stars, planets, etc.) and the spiritual heaven where the Lord is on His throne.

Jesus' advent was a true miracle. As the prophet, Isaiah, says, it is Emmanuel, "God with us." This distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. God so loved the world that He gave His very best. The Advent season commemorates God's visitation to live with us. God brought the spiritual realm and the earthly realm together that first Christmas night, splitting the physical heavens with visible angels announcing the birth of the Savior.

Why did the announcement go first to shepherds in the "waste places" of the land? They didn't ask God if He was sure He knew what He was doing. Had angels appeared to theologians, they would have first consulted their commentaries. Had He gone to the politicians, they would have looked around to see if anyone was watching to give them credit. Had He gone to the wealthy, they would have first checked their calendars. So He went to the shepherds—folks who wouldn't tell Him that angels don't sing to sheep or that messiahs aren't born in stables and laid in feed troughs.

In Bethlehem the spiritual world and physical world came together, realigned. What Jesus went on to accomplish on Earth makes it possible for God to reconcile all disharmonies between both worlds (Ephesians 1:10). It is no wonder a choir of angels broke out in spontaneous song, disturbing not only a few shepherds, but the entire universe. Albert Einstein said, "There are two ways to live. One is as if nothing is a miracle. The other as if everything is." The events of Christmas remind us of the truth in living according to the latter.

-Hal Baker

Main Ideas Made Simple

Sometimes it is hard to believe in miracles. We know from God's Word that there is a spiritual part of the world that we cannot see with our eyes, and since we cannot see it, or feel it, or hear it, or smell it, or even taste it, we might wonder if it is real. But while this spiritual world seems far away to us, the natural world and this supernatural world are together in God's eyes.

Jesus coming to earth was a true miracle. The Bible says that Jesus is "Emmanuel, God with us." During this season of Advent we remember this miracle where God brought the two worlds together for people to see. When Jesus was born, God sent the angels who split our earthly sky and allowed the shepherds to see and hear the angels singing praises and making the announcement that the time had finally come for the Savior to arrive on earth!

So, it is at the birth of Jesus in that little town of Bethlehem where two worlds came perfectly together.

Some things to think and talk about...

Is it ever hard for you to believe in miracles? Why or why not? What are some things in the spiritual world? Name your five senses. If you cannot experience something with your senses, does that mean it is not real? How did Jesus bring the two worlds together?

Activity

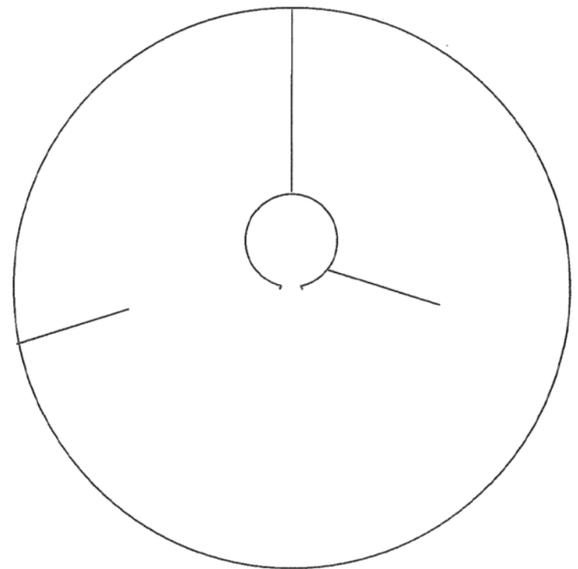
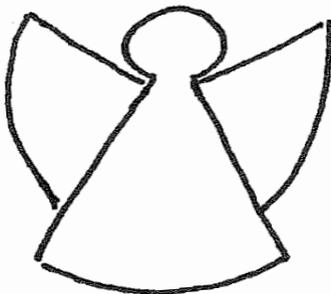
Paper Angels

You will need:

- Angel template
- Scissors
- Construction paper, or card stock (solid or printed)
- Ribbon or string
- a bead for hanging
- Tape

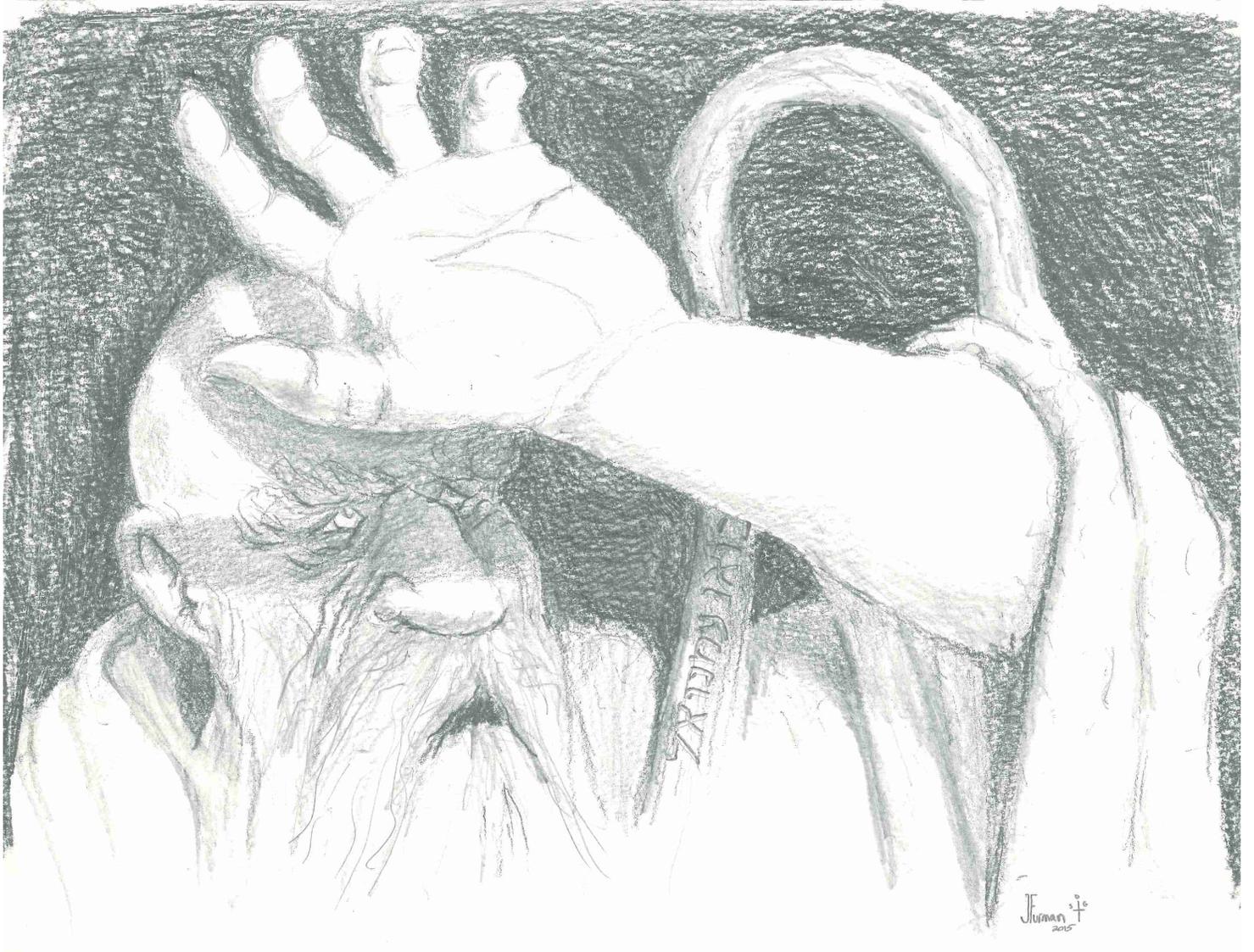
How to:

- ◆ Cut your paper according to your pattern along the black lines. Once you get the idea of these little angels, you may want to use patterned scissors for some of the cuts, or whole punches to add designs along the hems of their robes.
- ◆ Color, or decorate as desired.



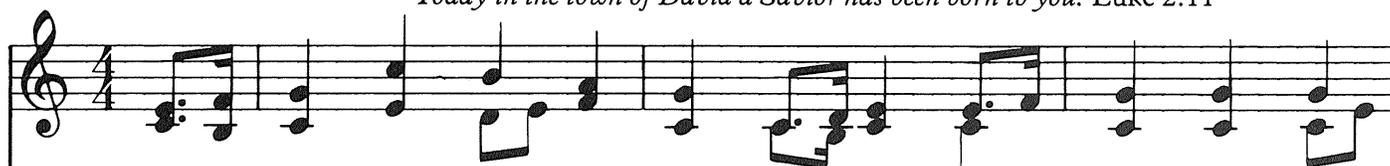
- ◆ Bend into a cone shape and slot the two slits together at the back with wings up, and tape on the back to secure (you may tape inside to hide the tape).
- ◆ Leave as small a hole at the top as possible.
- ◆ Loop the ribbon, slide the two ends through the bead and tie a knot to hold the bead on. Push the loop of ribbon up through the top of the angel. The bead should hold the ribbon in place. Alternatively, simply tape the ribbon in place.

While these paper angels certainly look nothing like the real angels that appeared to the shepherds, they do help us to remember that angels are real!



While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks 135

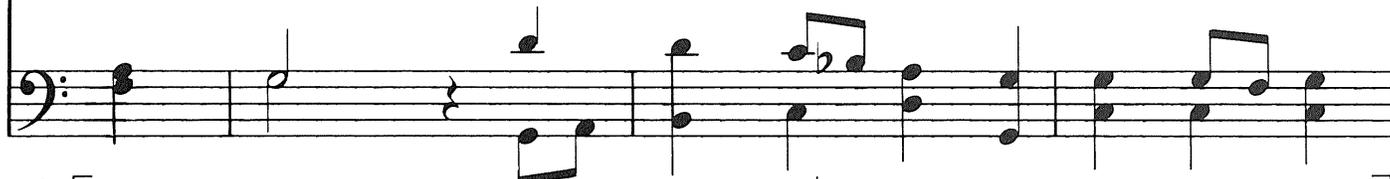
Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. Luke 2:11



1. While shep - herds watched their flocks by night, All seat - ed on
 2. "Fear not!" said he; for might - y dread Had seized their trou -
 3. "To you, in Da - vid's town this day, Is born of Da -
 4. "The heav'n - ly Babe you there shall find To hu - man view
 5. "All glo - ry be to God on high, And to the earth



the ground, The an - gel of the Lord came down,
 bled mind, "Glad ti - dings of great joy I bring
 vid's line, The Sav - ior who is Christ the Lord,
 dis - played, All mean - ly wrapped in swath - ing bands,
 be peace: Good will hence - forth from heav'n to men,



And glo - ry shone a - round, And glo - ry shone a - round.
 To you and all man - kind, To you and all man - kind.
 And this shall be the sign: And this shall be the sign:
 And in a man - ger laid; And in a man - ger laid.
 Be - gin and nev - er cease, Be - gin and nev - er cease."



TEXT: Nahum Tate
 MUSIC: George Frederick Handel; from Weyman's, *Melodia Sacra*, 1815

CHRISTMAS
 C.M. with Repeats

Colossians 1:15-23

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² He has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him, ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Joy to the World!

Joy to the world! The Lord is come:
Let earth receive her King;
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n 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,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, 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,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, 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,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders of His love.

*Text by Isaac Watts, based on Psalm 98
Music by G. F. Handel; arr. Lowell Mason, 1836*

*Firstborn of all creation. All things were created through Him and for Him. Before all things. Holds all things together. The head of the body and church. Beginning. Firstborn. All fullness of God. Through Him we are reconciled.
Making peace by the blood of the cross.*

Just whom do these words describe? Our God. Jesus! The One before Whom all knees shall bend in awe and humility. Truly, there is no other like Him.

As for sinful man, apart from Jesus and His redeeming work, he stands as *alienated, hostile, and evil*. Awesome God. Evil man. The difference could not be more stark!

Yet, joyfully, those God has chosen to be His followers stand as His adopted and loved sons. What else could our response be to this incredible blessing other than to proclaim in jubilant song:

*Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King.
Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns.*

-Jim Smith

Some things to think and talk about...

As a family, write your own psalm of praise celebrating that the Lord has come!

Activity

Advent Word Search:

Look for these words hidden in the box. They may be hidden forwards, backwards, up and down, and diagonally. Think about the importance of these words as you look for them, and maybe you can use some of them in your song of praise!

Almighty
Celebrate
Emmanuel
Eternal
Everlasting
Father
Give Thanks
Glory
God
God in Flesh
Holy
Honor
Hope
Incarnate
Jesus
Joy
Keeper of Promises
King of Kings
Lamb of God
Light of the World
Lord of Lords
Mighty
Miracle
Peace
Prince of Peace
Rejoice
Rescue
Savior
Sinless
Truth
Wonderful Counselor
Word made Flesh
Worthy

W	L	J	O	S	E	P	H	A	Q	P	Z	J	E	S	S	E	G	K	E
O	O	A	Q	Q	P	R	I	N	C	E	O	F	P	E	A	C	E	E	V
N	R	R	E	J	O	I	C	E	B	A	B	Y	M	O	P	E	D	E	E
D	D	E	D	R	O	O	T	W	E	C	S	U	S	E	J	L	O	P	R
E	O	K	O	M	I	R	A	C	L	E	X	C	V	T	B	E	G	E	L
R	F	F	S	A	A	Y	C	E	H	P	O	R	P	A	A	B	F	R	A
F	L	W	S	G	O	D	I	N	F	L	E	S	H	N	Z	R	O	O	S
U	O	R	E	S	C	U	E	D	G	L	A	D	W	R	G	A	B	F	T
L	R	H	A	P	P	Y	O	F	V	Z	X	M	X	A	F	T	M	P	I
C	D	O	Z	S	Q	G	Q	G	L	O	R	Y	A	C	M	E	A	R	N
O	S	Y	N	J	F	J	K	G	D	E	M	M	A	N	U	E	L	O	G
U	W	O	W	O	S	S	E	L	N	I	S	A	I	I	G	S	T	M	F
N	Q	B	B	V	H	H	M	I	P	H	A	H	E	G	T	E	E	I	A
S	X	M	D	F	P	J	O	Y	W	A	V	T	P	T	H	P	R	S	T
E	A	X	Z	H	M	M	X	P	A	Z	I	G	M	U	E	T	A	E	H
L	I	G	H	T	O	F	T	H	E	W	O	R	L	D	Y	R	Y	S	E
O	O	A	Z	U	F	L	P	Y	Z	X	R	J	M	A	R	Y	N	X	R
R	A	V	W	R	K	I	Y	R	H	T	R	O	W	D	F	D	S	A	X
X	N	M	E	T	P	Y	S	A	S	G	N	H	A	I	S	S	E	M	L
A	L	M	I	G	H	T	Y	G	O	D	R	E	D	E	E	M	E	R	M
D	A	V	I	D	A	K	I	N	G	O	F	K	I	N	G	S	D	V	B

Luke 2:25-35

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

²⁹ "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word;

³⁰ for my eyes have seen Your salvation

³¹ that You have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

³³ And His father and his mother marveled at what was said about Him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Come, Thou Long-expected Jesus

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art,
Dear Desire of ev'ry nation,
Joy of ev'ry longing heart.

Joy to those who long to see Thee,
Dayspring from on high, appear;
Come, Thou promised Rod of Jesse,
Of Thy birth we long to hear!
O'er the hills the angels singing news,
Glad tidings of a birth;
"Go to Him, your praises bringing;
Christ the Lord has come to earth."

Come to earth to taste our sadness,
He whose glories knew no end;
By His life He brings us gladness,
Our Redeemer, Shepherd, Friend.
Leaving riches without number,
Born within a cattle stall;
This the everlasting wonder,
Christ was born the Lord of all.

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a king,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all-sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

Text by Charles Wesley (1744) and Mark Hunt (1978); Tune by R.H. Pritchard, 1855

Is there something that you know of, that you love so much and yet you are afraid you might never get to experience or see in this life? Perhaps you hope to have a sailboat someday or a ranch in Wyoming, or maybe a baby brother or sister. Well, there was a man in Jerusalem who had been waiting all his life hoping he would get to see the promised Savior before he died.

Undoubtedly, for much of his life, Simeon had studied God's Word and knew that the "Lord's Christ" would be coming to earth to save His people from their sins. Simeon believed God would keep His promise, but would he get to see this One before he died?

You might be able to imagine Simeon's great joy when Joseph and Mary showed up one day with their son, Jesus, to present Him to the Lord according to the Law. Maybe you are wondering how Simeon knew that this Jesus, son of Joseph and Mary, was the One he had been waiting for. The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit had told Simeon that his greatest desire would be fulfilled, he would get to see the One Who is "salvation and a light to the Gentiles and a glory to His people Israel." And now it is as if the Spirit said to Simeon, "Here He is, the Promised One." Simeon was so overjoyed and filled with thanksgiving that he took the Child and held Him.

As Simeon was holding Jesus, he looked up to God and blessed God and said, "You have kept your promise and I am ready to die in peace for I have seen your salvation to your people Israel and to those who have not been your people, the Gentiles."

Do you see? God does keep His promises, and He kept this promise to send Jesus for our salvation. Today we have hope because Jesus came and did what He promised to do. Are you filled with a desire to see Jesus, the promised Savior? Do you overflow with thanksgiving and joy for the salvation He has accomplished for you?

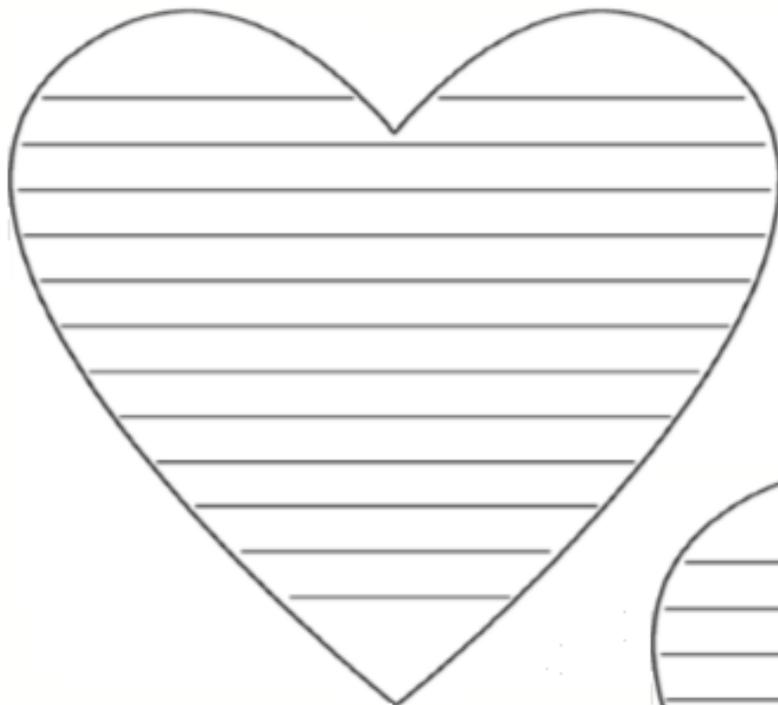
-David Shank

Some things to think and talk about...

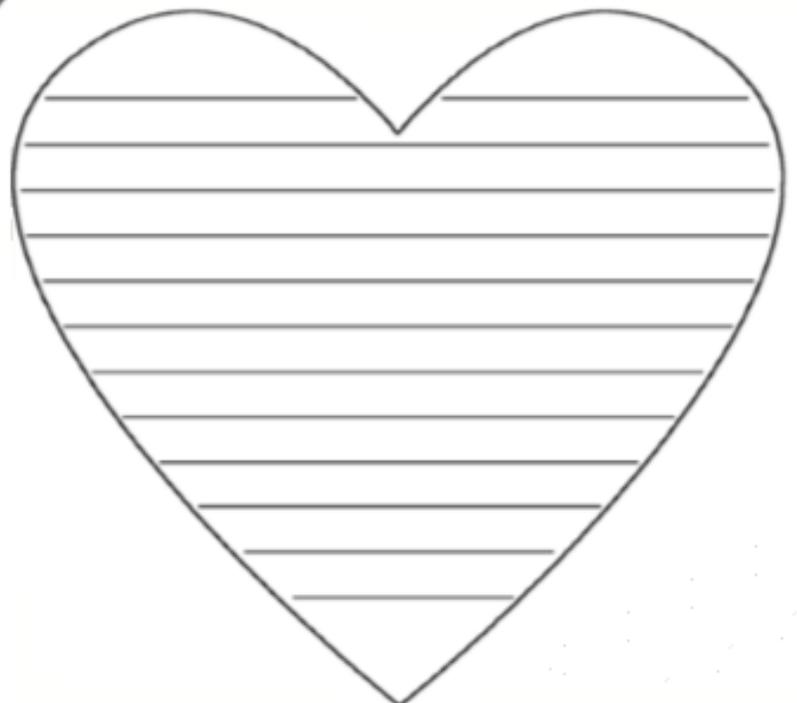
What are some things that you have hoped for and waited for a very long time? What is the difference between wishing and waiting for something that you have been promised will happen and wishing and waiting for something that you don't know if it will happen? How do you think Simeon felt when the Holy Spirit told him that the little baby Jesus was the One for Whom he had been waiting? How do you feel when a promise comes to pass?

Activity

God keeps His promises! As a family, make a list of some of the wonderful Bible promises that have been fulfilled. Add to the list promises of God that have been fulfilled in your own family. Then pray together and give thanks to God for His faithfulness!



PROMISES



124 Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives. Isa. 61:1

> 1. Come, Thou long - ex - spect - ed Je - sus, Born to set Thy peo - ple free;
> 2. Born Thy peo - ple to de - liv - er, Born a Child, and yet a King,

From our fears and sins re - lease us; Let us find our rest in Thee.
Born to reign in us for - ev - er, Now Thy gra - cious king - dom bring.

Is - rael's strength and con - so - la - tion, Hope of all the earth Thou art;
By Thine own e - ter - nal Spir - it Rule in all our hearts a - lone;

Dear De - sire of ev - 'ry na - tion, Joy of ev - 'ry long - ing heart.
By Thine all - suf - fi - cient mer - it, Raise us to Thy glo - rious throne.

TEXT: Charles Wesley
MUSIC: Rowland H. Prichard; arranged by Robert Harkness

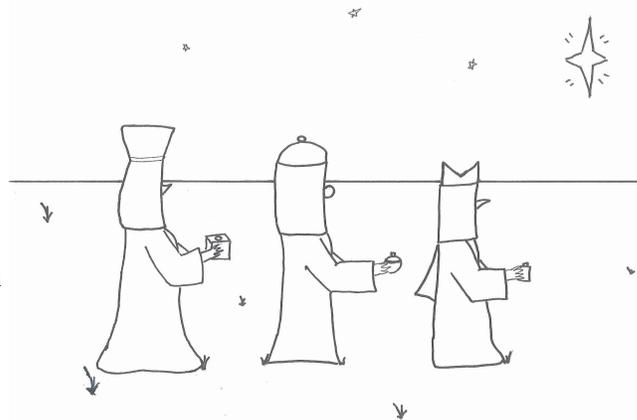
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Matthew 2:1-9

¹ 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, ² 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.” ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ⁶ “And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler Who will shepherd my people Israel.”

⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found Him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship Him.” ⁹ After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.



Sing We the Song of Immanuel

Sing we the song of Immanuel,
This the Christ who was long foretold.
Lo in the shadows of Bethlehem,
Promise of dawn now our eyes behold.
God most high in a manger laid,
Lift your voices and now proclaim.
Great and glorious, Love has come to us,
Join now with the hosts of heaven.

Come we to welcome Immanuel,
King who came with no crown or throne.
Helpless he lay, the invincible,
Maker of Mary, now Mary's son.

O what wisdom to save us all,
Shepherds, sages, before him fall.
Grace and majesty, What humility,
Come on bended knee, adore Him.

Go spread the news of Immanuel,
Joy and peace for the weary heart.
Lift up your heads, for your King has come,
Sing for the light overwhelms the dark.
Glory shining for all to see,
Hope alive, let the gospel ring.
God has made a way, He will have the praise
Tell the world His name is Jesus

*Music and words by Matt Boswell, Matt Papa, and Stuart Townend. ©2015
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Matthew began this narrative with a story featuring the juxtaposition of Herod and the Magi. The motives and actions of these characters are in stark contrast with one another. Herod was the king (he is half-Jewish), ruler over Jerusalem and the Jewish people. The Magi were Gentiles (likely from Babylon), seeking to worship the King of the Jews. In his gospel, Matthew highlighted how the birth of Jesus led both Jews and Gentiles to an important crossroads.

Herod, the Jewish priests, and the Magi each had to decide how they would respond to the arrival of the prophesied Messiah. Both the Jewish chief priests and the Magi knew about the prophecy in Micah 5:2 quoted here in Matthew 2:6. Bethlehem was to be the birthplace of the Good Shepherd, the King of the Jews. With the arrival of the star, the Gentile Magi eagerly left their homes and journeyed for months in anticipation of worshiping the Messiah. On the other hand, the chief priests were seemingly ambivalent to the news of the Messiah's birth. Did they go to meet him? Did they consider making the short trip from Jerusalem to Bethlehem with the Magi? Not at all. Did Herod desire to worship the King of the Jews? No, his first response was to have him quickly killed.

The coming of Jesus divided people, and continues to do so today. Because of sin, Jesus can be seen as a threat or as a savior. He is only a threat to those who desire to be king of their own lives. May we learn a lesson from the Gentile Magi and receive Jesus humbly, eagerly, and in a posture of worship. For Jesus is Immanuel, God come to earth, on a mission to save sinners like you and me.

-John Kidd

Main Ideas Made Simple

One of the really fun things about the Christmas season is all of the lights decorating houses and businesses. Isn't it fun to sit at night next to our sparkling Christmas tree?

And how fitting that even people who don't understand all that Christmas is would celebrate with lights! After all, what sign did God give in the night sky to announce His Son? Yes! He placed a star; a brand new light to communicate with the wise men that the new king had been born. Isn't that perfect? After all, Jesus came into the world to be the "Light of the world." Likewise, Jesus called His people to be lights in this dark world, too. His light shines through us so that others might learn of the salvation to be found in Jesus.

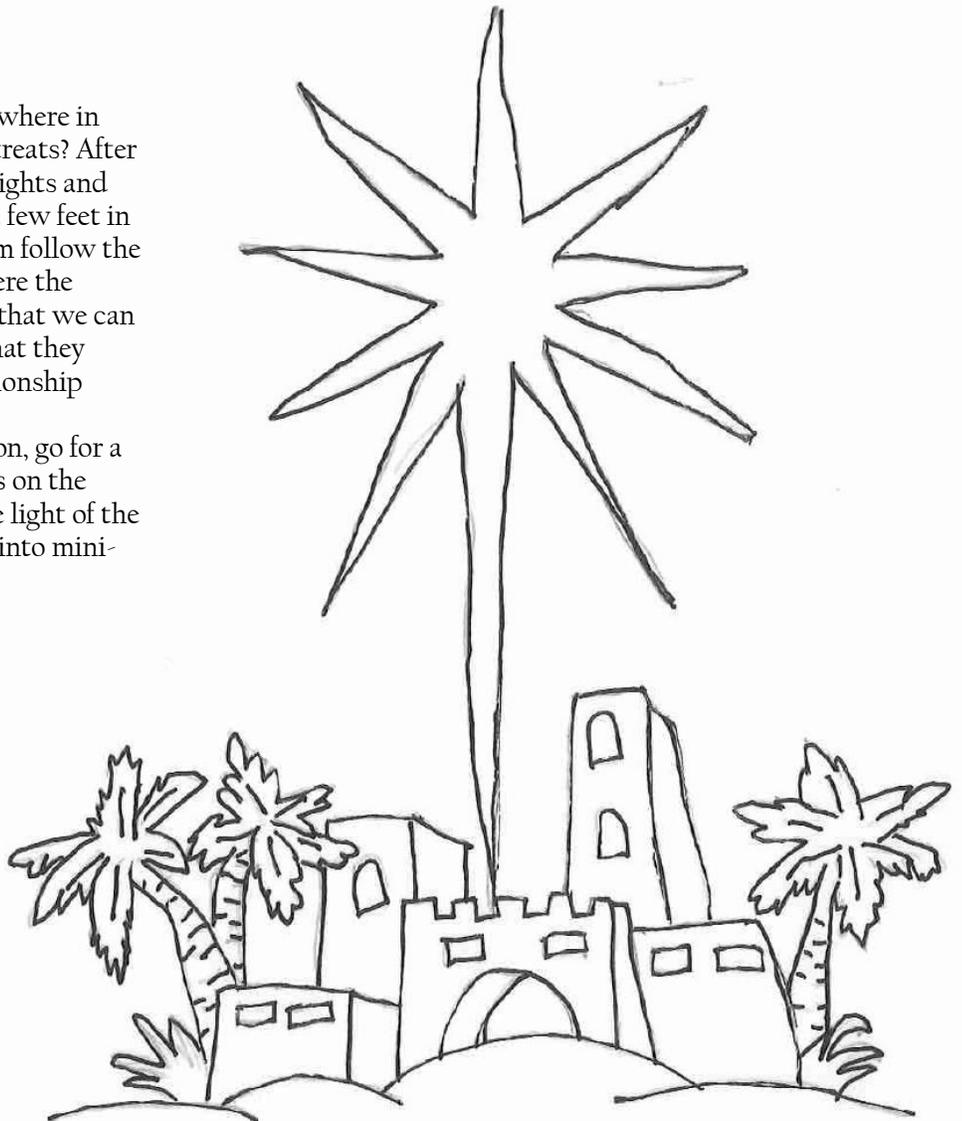
Some things to think and talk about...

Talk about some of the properties of light (puts out darkness, but darkness cannot put it out, allows us to see where we go, provides warmth, is comforting at night, helps us know what things are, etc.) How does Jesus display some of these properties for us?

Activity

Hide something fun somewhere in your house...perhaps after dinner treats? After Advent Devotional time, dim the lights and grab a flashlight. Shine the beam a few feet in front of the children and have them follow the light of the "flashlight star" to where the goodies are hidden. Discuss ways that we can be light to the world around us, that they might taste the sweetness of relationship with Jesus.

Alternatively, or in addition, go for a nighttime ride and enjoy the lights on the houses as you remember Jesus, the light of the world Who has in turn turned us into mini-beacons for the world!



Revelation 22:16-17

¹⁶“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” ¹⁷The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

Come, Behold the Wondrous Mystery

Come, behold the wondrous myst'ry
In the dawning of the King,
He, the theme of heaven's praises,
Robed in frail humanity
In our longing, in our darkness,
Now the light of life has come;
Look to Christ, Who condescended,
Took on flesh to ransom us.

Come, behold the wondrous myst'ry:
He the perfect Son of Man,
In His living, in His suff'ring,
Never trace nor stain of sin.
See the true and better Adam
Come to save the hellbound man,
Christ, the great and sure fulfillment
Of the law, in Him we stand.

Come, behold the wondrous myst'ry:
Christ, the Lord, upon the tree;
In the stead of ruined sinners
Hangs the Lamb in victory.
See the price of our redemption;
See the Father's plan unfold,
Bringing many sons to glory,
Grace unmeasured, love untold!

Come, behold the wondrous myst'ry:
Slain by death, the God of life;
But no grave could e'er restrain Him,
Praise the Lord, He is alive!
What a foretaste of deliv'rance;
How unwavering our hope:
Christ in power resurrected;
As we will be when He comes.

*Words by Matt Papa, Matt Boswell, and Michael Bleecker,
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As we anticipate Christmas Day, we know it is not merely a reminder of something that happened 2000 years ago. Christ coming into this world as a little child was the beginning of our future hope. Here in Revelation we get a glimpse into heavenly activities that culminate with the redemption of the church. This redemption has been part of God's plan from the beginning.

We see this throughout the Old Testament, particularly in the role of the Davidic kings. As Jesus refers to Himself as the “root and descendant of David,” He alludes to the fact that He comes from the kingly line of David as the One Who will sit upon the throne for eternity. He is the “bright morning star” which is a reference to the well-known symbol in Jewish writings that pointed toward the long-awaited Savior and King.

One commentator puts it this way, “The morning star is a promise that the long night of tribulation is all but over and that the new eschatological day is about to dawn” (Robert Mounce). It is a sign of hope and a promise that the way things are now in our sin and brokenness will be no more, and the way things ought to be is imminent.

And so the people of God (the bride), through the Holy Spirit, anticipate that day and call others to anticipate with them. “Come” and drink deeply of the water of life; the water that truly satisfies. “Come” and find life in the One Who was born sinless, Who stood in our place, and now reigns from on high. He is the true King on David's throne, the bright morning star, and our hope for redemption in this life and the next.

*What a foretaste of deliv'rance;
How unwavering our hope:
Christ in power resurrected;
As we will be when He comes.*

-Tim Frost

Main Ideas Made Simple

Christmas is almost here! It is so good to know that we are not just celebrating a past event. We are celebrating our future hope. This Bible verse from Revelation is a peek into heaven and the redemption of the Church, all part of God's plan from the very beginning.

From the very beginning God had a plan to set all things right. We can see this throughout the Old Testament. We read about King David and the promise that from his descendants would be the "bright morning star," another name for Jesus, the eternal King!

We, the people of God, are the Bride of Christ. We eagerly look forward to the day when Jesus will return, and call out to others to join us. "Come" and find life in the One Who was born sinless, Who stood in our place, and now reigns from on high. He is the true King on David's throne, and our hope in this life and the next!

Some things to think and talk about...

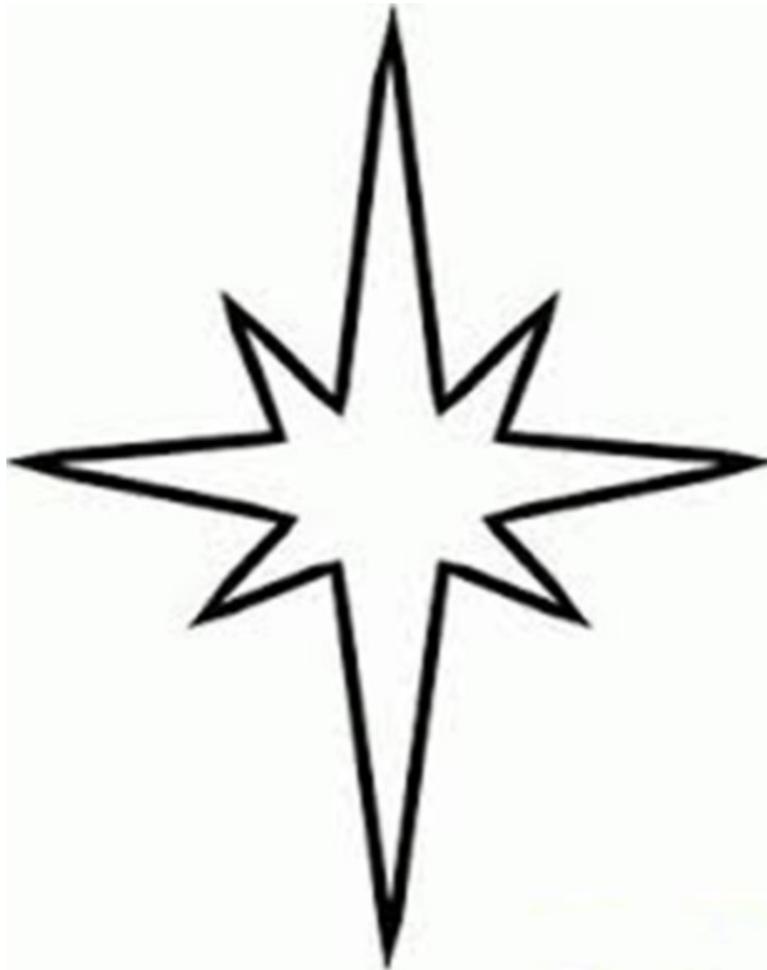
We know that the Old Testament tells us, "A Savior is coming!" and the New Testament tells us, "A Savior has come!" Think together of ways the Old Testament points to Jesus. For instance, how does the story of Moses and the first Passover point to Jesus? How does the story of Abraham and Isaac point to Jesus? Can you think of others?

God's people call out, "Come." How can you invite others to come and be part of God's Kingdom?

Activity

A morning star signals that night is almost over; the wait for morning is coming to an end.

Trace this "morning star" template several times. Have each family member decorate one, cut it out, and put it in your bedrooms. When you go to sleep think how the wait for Christmas is almost done, and remember the hope we have as we wait for the return of King Jesus!



John 1:14-18

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about Him, and cried out, “This was He of Whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because He was before me.’”) ¹⁶ For from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, He has made Him known.

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

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 th’ angelic host proclaim,
“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”
Hark! the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King.”
Christ, by highest heav’n adored;
Christ, the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come,
Offspring of the Virgin’s womb:
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail th’ incarnate Deity,

Pleased as man with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King.”
Hail the heav’n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Ris’n 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.”

Text: Charles Wesley; Music: Felix Mendelssohn; arranged by William H. Cummings

Well, it is finally here! Christmas Day! All the waiting is over, and the day we have been waiting for has come. For many people in the world today, the natural question is, “Why the fuss? Why all this celebration for the birth of a baby over 2000 years ago?”

The answer to that question is manifold, but one of the primary reasons for the elaborate celebration is contained in this passage. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” The amazing truth we celebrate with the birth of Christ is the fact that God became man. We call this phenomenon “the incarnation,” and it is indeed astonishing to think about. The God of the universe, Who made everything and sustains it by His own power, saw fit to become a man and take His place among His fallen creation. “Why did He need to do this” you might ask. Once again, today’s passage gives us the answer.

First, verse 16 tells us “from His fullness we have all received grace upon grace.” We are able to experience God’s grace in abundance because God became a man like us. By becoming man, Jesus was able to be our substitute, taking the punishment we rightly deserve when He died on the cross. Without the incarnation, the cross of Christ could not have happened, and we are left to face God’s wrath for our sins. Without the incarnation, we could never enter into a loving relationship with our Creator and God.

Second, verse 18 tells us “no one has seen God,” but Jesus, as the incarnate Son, “has made Him known.” Because Jesus became a man and dwelt among us, we can know God. The Scriptures give us an up-close and personal look at Jesus, God’s Son, and since we have this picture of Jesus, we are able to know God to a greater degree than we would know Him otherwise. Jesus shows us the power of God in His miraculous signs performed by Christ. The teachings of Jesus illustrate to us the wisdom of God. The holiness of God is illustrated in Jesus’ sinless life and His condemnation of sin. Most of all, in Jesus we see clearly the love and mercy of God as He provides our way of salvation through His willingness to go to the cross to save us from our sins.

So amidst all the presents, food, and time with family and friends on this Christmas day, let us not forget what all the celebration is really about, the coming of Christ. God becoming man and dwelling among us so that we might know God and be reconciled to him. Today, let us celebrate “Jesus, our Emmanuel.”

-J.D. Patton

Main Ideas Made Simple

It's here! It's here! It is finally Christmas day! We are ready to celebrate, but many around the world look at our celebration and wonder, "Why all this fuss over a baby born 2,000 years ago?"

Well, we know of many reasons to make a great fuss over the birth of this baby, but perhaps one of the main reasons is contained in this passage. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The amazing truth we celebrate is that God became a man. There is a fancy word for this: incarnation. It is pretty astonishing that the God of the universe, Who made everything, and knows everything would take on the form of man and walk with sinful people. This raises another question, "Why did He do this?"

Again, the answers to this question are found in today's passage. First, we learn in verse 16 that, "From His fullness we have all received grace upon grace." As sinners we sure need that grace. Jesus needed to become man to take the punishment that we deserved by dying on the cross and we would be left to face the wrath of God on our own. Without the incarnation, we would never be able to have a loving relationship with God.

Second, verse 18 tells us that "no one has seen God," but Jesus, as the incarnate Son (the man Who was God) has "made Him known." Because we have Jesus, we are able to know God more fully than we could without Jesus. We see God's wisdom when we read about the way Jesus preached. We see God's power in the miracles Jesus performed. We see God's holiness in the sinless life of Jesus. And best of all, we can see His love and mercy in the way Jesus was willing to go to the cross to save us!

So, as you celebrate with presents and food and family and friends on this Christmas day, don't forget what the celebration is really all about: the coming of Christ, the incarnation, being reconciled to God, Jesus our Emmanuel!

Some things to think and talk about...

Review what "Incarnation" means. Review what "Emmanuel" means. Explain in your own words why we celebrate Christmas

Activity:

You most likely have plenty of activities today! Just remember to give thanks in the midst of it all!

Give 
Thanks

Hark! the Herald Angels Sing 133

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace. Luke 2:14

- 1. Hark! the her - ald an - gels sing, "Glo - ry to the new - born King;
 - 2. Christ, by high - est heav'n a - dored; Christ, the ev - er - last - ing Lord!
 - 3. Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Right-eous-ness!

Peace on earth, and mer - cy mild, God and sin - ners rec - on - ciled!"
 Late in time be - hold Him come, Off - spring of the Vir - gin's womb:
 Light and life to all He brings, Ris'n with heal - ing in His wings.

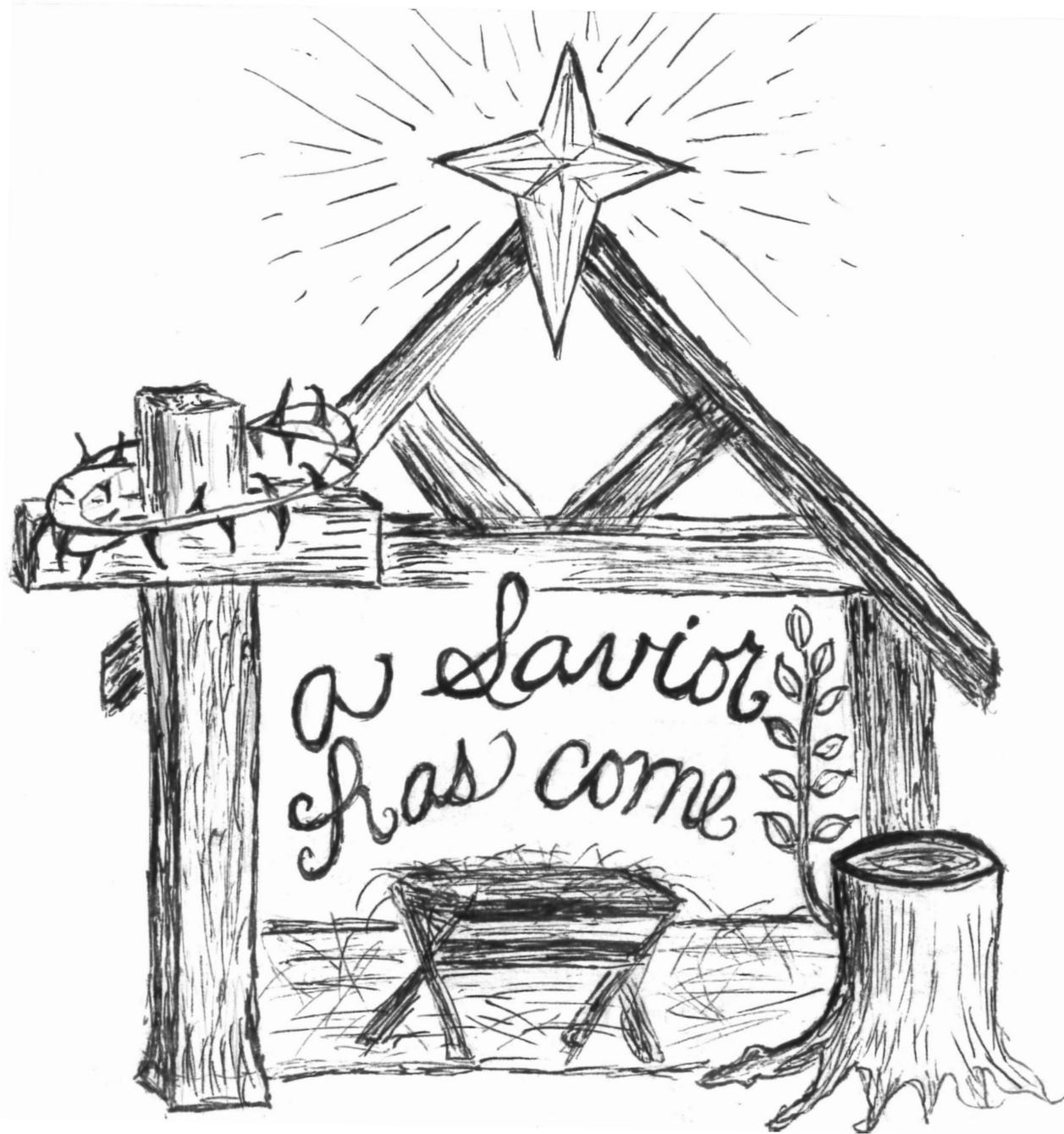
Joy - ful, all ye na - tions, rise, Join the tri - umph of the skies;
 Veiled in flesh the God - head see; Hail th'in - car - nate De - i - ty,
 Mild He lays His glo - ry by, Born that man no more may die,

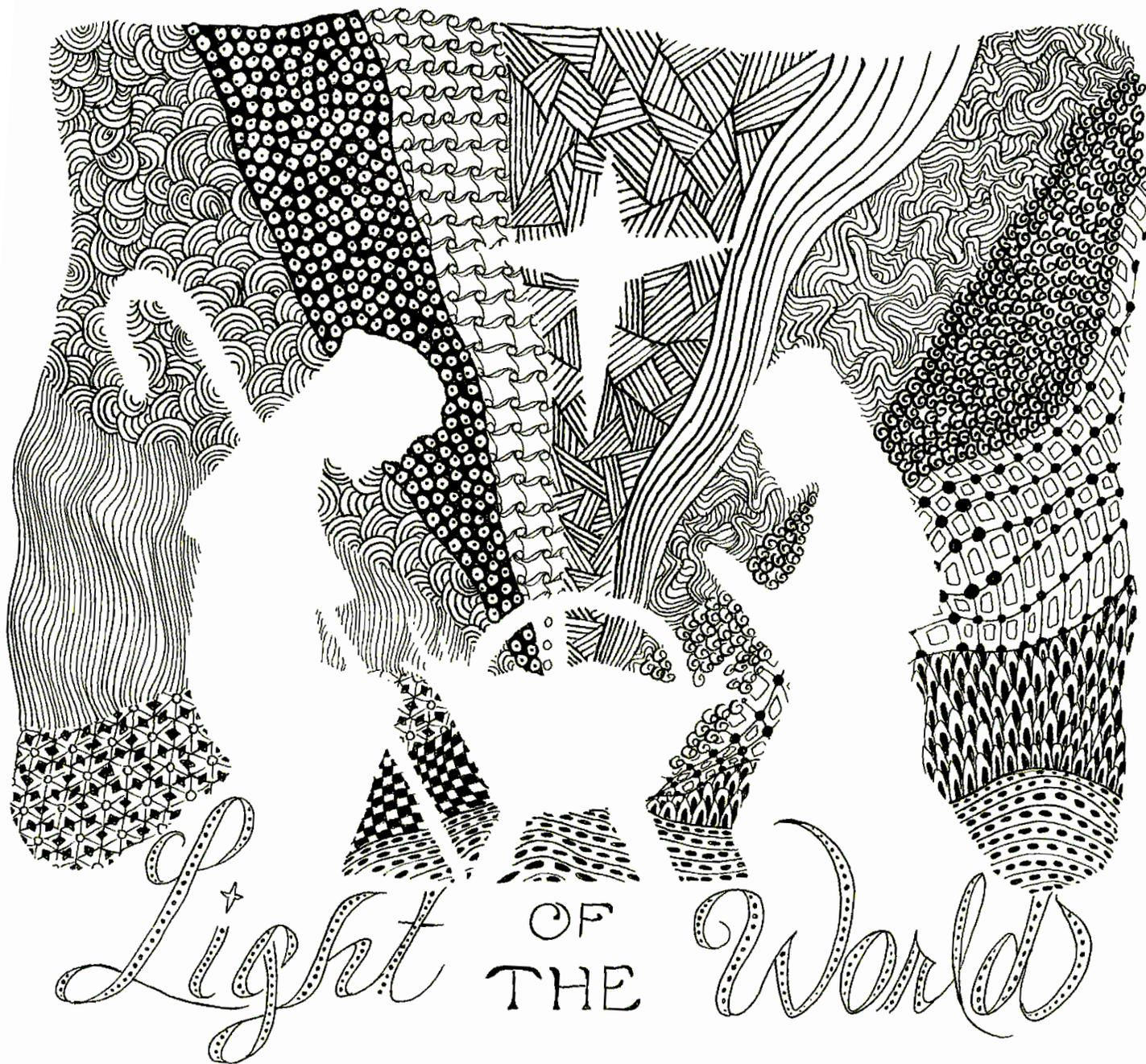
With th'an - gel - ic host pro - claim, "Christ is born in Beth - le - hem!"
 Pleased as man with men to dwell, Je - sus, our Em - man - u - el.
 Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them sec - ond birth.

Hark! the her - ald an - gels sing, "Glo - ry to the new - born King."

TEXT: Charles Wesley, altered
 MUSIC: Felix Mendelssohn; arranged by William H. Cummings

MENDELSSOHN
 7.7.7.7.D. with Refrain





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