



JOURNEY TO **BETHLEHEM**

ADVENT 2025

Journey to Bethlehem

DAY ONE (November 30)

The Advent story begins and ends in the little town of Bethlehem. What an unusual place for the Promised Savior to be born. It was the prophet Micah, who lived 750 years before the birth of Jesus, who foretold where the Messiah would be born: *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.”* (Micah 5:2)

The promised Messiah would be born, of all places, in Bethlehem... and more specifically, Bethlehem Ephrathah.

“Ephrathah” is the ancient name of a district of Bethlehem and was used to distinguish it from other towns of the same name. There are two different “Bethlehems” mentioned in the Bible, and the Messiah would be born at “Bethlehem Ephrathah”.

750 years later, the Jewish people had the clear expectation that their coming Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. In the gospel of Matthew 2:1-6 we read, *“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’ When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they replied, ‘for this is what the prophet has written: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”*

We are also given another unexpected bit of information regarding Bethlehem Ephrathah...

Micah 5:2 *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah...”*

The Amplified version translates that *“You are too little to be among the clans of Judah”*

Each of the 12 tribes of Israel were divided into thousands (it’s clans) ... but if a community was too small to get a thousand people together, they were blended into other tribes.

Bethlehem was so tiny and insignificant numerically, that it could not even be counted as a “clan” ... It was a village that was considered unimportant because it was so small and insignificant to most other people ... But that is just how God works ... **He takes the most unlikely and insignificant people or places and uses them to accomplish something**

great and mighty... You may see yourself as insignificant in this world. But know this, like Bethlehem, nothing nor no one is insignificant in the hands of God! Praise the Lord! Our journey to Bethlehem is off to a very encouraging start.

DAY TWO (December 1)

The unlikely selection of Bethlehem adds a lot significant meaning to our Advent journey. There are several important truths hidden in the selection of Bethlehem.

First, Bethlehem predicts the suffering of the coming Messiah. Grab a Bible and turn to Genesis 35.

A quick background here... Jacob was the one who worked 7 years to marry a girl named Rachel but was deceived by his father in-law into marrying Rachel's older sister, Leah.

So, Jacob worked another 7 years for his father in-law, in order to marry the girl he truly loved, Rachel.

For quite some time Rachel was unable to have children and so, not to be out done by her older sister, Rachel gave her maid to Jacob so that they could have children together.

Eventually, God did allow Rachel to become pregnant with a son, whom they named Joseph... Because Joseph was the only child from the true love of his life, Jacob favored him over his 10 other sons who sold Joseph as a slave and made up a story about how he was killed by a wild animal...

And after that, God opened Rachel's womb once again and she became pregnant for a 2nd time.

Genesis 35:16 - Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, "Don't despair, for you have another son." As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin. So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).

So here, just on the outskirts of Bethlehem, we have the account of a birth, which culminated in great suffering and sorrow. About 1700 years later, there was another birth in Bethlehem... the birth of Jesus, a birth that also ultimately resulted in the suffering and sorrow of the Savior.

And so, the journey to Bethlehem pictures the suffering of the Savior.

This is important for two reasons. First, the suffering of the Messiah shows that God is NOT distant from our suffering. His love for us is so great that He entered into our suffering. He comes along beside us in our suffering to walk with us and help us because He has walked there too. Secondly, the suffering of the Messiah secures our salvation. He suffered for us, to save us, to redeem us from the power of sin. *“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God . . .”* - 1 Peter 3:18

Bethlehem pictures the suffering of the Savior.

DAY THREE (December 2)

Bethlehem also foreshadows the redeeming work of the Messiah.

The word “redemption” as used in the Bible means “to purchase back something that was lost.” We see this pictured in Ruth 4.

Redemption is a central theme of the book of Ruth, and it primarily revolves around the need to redeem and preserve the family lineage of the man Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their deceased sons.

In ancient Israelite society, the idea of redemption was closely tied to the responsibility of a “kinsman-redeemer,” a relative who had the duty to protect the interests and welfare of his extended family.

Elimelech and Naomi were from Bethlehem and they moved to the neighboring country of Moab with their two sons. The sons soon married Moabite women, but tragically both sons and the father Elimelech died. When the men died, Naomi decided to move back to Bethlehem. Only one of her daughters-in-law, Ruth, made the journey with her. There, Ruth met Boaz, a relative of Naomi and Elimelech, and they fell in love. They couldn’t marry, because they weren’t the nearest of kin. A closer relative was required to marry Ruth and preserve the family name.

When the nearer relative refused to marry Ruth and preserve the family lineage of Elimelech, Boaz talked with him and was given permission to purchase the inheritance of Elimelech and the rights to marry Ruth.

Ruth 4:9-10 - *Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, “Today you are witnesses that I have bought (redeemed) from Naomi all the property of Elimelek, Kilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon’s widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses!”*

So, Boaz redeemed his bride in Bethlehem.

This foreshadows the redemptive work of Jesus. Born in Bethlehem, Jesus came to redeem us, the Church... His bride. When it comes to spiritual redemption, the Bible teaches us everyone is enslaved to sin and in Satan's grip, and there is no way for us to free ourselves... We need a Redeemer... Jesus is that Redeemer! He gave His life to purchase our rescue, our redemption from sin.

The little town of Bethlehem reminds us of Redemption in Christ.

DAY FOUR (December 3)

Bethlehem pictures the Royalty of the Messiah!

In 1 Samuel 16 we are introduced to a man named Jesse, who has a son named, David. Check this out . . . Jesse was the grandson of Boaz and Ruth, which would make David their great grandson.

1 Samuel 16:1 - *The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king."*

When the prophet Samuel is given the assignment to anoint the next king of Israel, the Lord tells him that he is to be found in this little, seemingly insignificant town of Bethlehem.

The Lord then leads Samuel to Jesse who brings out his 7 oldest sons for inspection, but none of them are chosen.

Samuel waves each one by – Eliab, Abinadab, Shammah and the rest...

Finally, Samuel asks Jesse if he has any more sons... and he does... – the youngest and the littlest – out in the fields keeping watch over the sheep – a boy named: David.

Just a shepherd boy, who was anointed as King from this little town... ... and if you work through the genealogies of Scripture, you will find that this little shepherd boy was the 39th great grandfather of another little boy, another King, born in the same little town, ... and His Name is Jesus, Immanuel, God with us!

Boaz and Ruth established their family tree in Bethlehem and that is why Mary and Joseph had to return there for the census and be registered for the tax.

Jesus came into the world as a King. The Wise Men said: *“Where is He that is born KING of the Jews?”*... A few days before His crucifixion, the crowds chanted – *“Blessed be the King that comes in the name of the Lord.”*

Unfortunately, the people wanted a different kind of King. A king that would free them from the oppression of Rome. A king that would perform miracles, feed the poor, heal the sick, and raise the dead. But Jesus didn't come to defeat Rome, but sin and Satan. Jesus came to be the King of our hearts and lives ... NOT to set up an EARTHLY kingdom, so they crowned Him with THORNS... not a crown of gold. They mocked Him with a scarlet robe. They placed a reed in His right hand for a scepter. They spat on Him ... mocked Him ... beat Him and killed Him. YET ... He was born in Bethlehem to be the ONLY KING who could rule in the hearts of mankind and bring salvation to our souls.

This little town of Bethlehem was a place of royalty. The birthplace of Kings.

DAY FIVE (December 4)

Today we discover the final secret about the selection of this tiny town: Bethlehem foreshadows the deity of the Messiah.

And this brings us back to our original verse that we read on Day One.

Micah 5:2 - *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.”*

The phrase “come forth to Me”... could also be translated “come forth OF me” which indicates that the coming ruler would come from God himself.

This is similar to what Abraham told Isaac in Genesis 22:8... “God himself will provide the lamb”...

Here in Micah 5:2 we have the promise that God the Father would send God the Son to become a man who was sacrificed as payment for our sins. This Ruler is God Himself!

“Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.” ... This phrase literally means, “From the days of eternity.” This expression in the Hebrew language is used only to describe God.

We see the same expression used in Habakkuk 1:12 - *“Are You not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One?”*

The coming Ruler to be born in Bethlehem would be fully human, and yet fully divine. The God/Man Jesus Messiah was born in Bethlehem, yet He's been around since before time began. He is the Eternal One. Jesus existed before all things! Before anything else existed, He was! He said in John 8:58 "Before Abraham was born, I AM." He was clearly stating that He IS YAHWEH, the eternally existing God of the universe. Since our Lord existed before all created things, He must be uncreated. Since He is uncreated, He is eternal. Since He is eternal, He . . . is . . . God! He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the beginning and the end!

Bethlehem reveals to us the eternal nature of Jesus the Messiah. The One whose origins are from old, from everlasting!

Tomorrow our path takes a turn as we meet the first people on our journey to Bethlehem.

DAY SIX (December 5)

Today our journey takes us into the city of Jerusalem, through its winding streets, up a grand stone staircase and into the Temple. As the temple gates slowly swing open, a three-fold blast from the priest's silver trumpet call the people of Israel to worship. There are about 50 priests on duty today and one is selected to offer the incense in the Holy Place, a sacred duty which could only be done once in a priest's lifetime. The priest selected today was a good, godly man named Zacharias. He was married to a righteous women named Elizabeth. They were now over 60 years old and had never been able to have children.

Zacharias had been waiting over 40 years to hear his name called to burn incense in the Temple. Today his name was finally called. For the first and last time in his life he would do the incensing! What a great, joyous honor this was!

Two assistants joined Zacharias. One to remove the coals from the last offering and the other to spread fresh hot coals from the morning sacrifice. After performing their duties, the assistants retreated backwards, bowing in worship to the Lord. Everyone was quiet, falling face down before the Lord, and at the appropriate time, Zacharias sprinkled the incense on the red-hot glowing coals. The incense kindles and burns, and the sweet-smelling smoke rises in a fragrant cloud symbolizing praise and prayer to God.

Zacharias was about to bow down himself in worship when something wondrous stopped his steps and caught his breath. Suddenly, to the right of the altar of incense stood an Angel!

Sometimes, questions about things that happen on earth can only be answered in Heaven. Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth had been waiting for God to answer their prayers for over

40 years! Praying for a child, praying for the honor to serve God in the Temple. Praying, waiting, praying, waiting. Nothing. Did God hear? Does He care? But while there was empty silence on earth, Heaven was busy. God, all along, had been preparing Zacharias, Elizabeth and the entire world for the coming of the Messiah. Zacharias could never have dreamt the part God would have him play in the journey to Bethlehem.

So, you keep praying and keep waiting. God hears! *“I waited patiently for the Lord to help me, and he turned to me and heard my cry.”* (Psalm 40:1)

DAY SEVEN (December 6)

While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. But the angel said, “Don’t be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly.” Zechariah said to the angel, “How can I be sure this will happen? I’m an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years.” Then the angel said, “I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! But now, since you didn’t believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time.” (Luke 1:11-20)

We are all familiar with the story of “The Grinch Who Stole Christmas.” It is an entertaining story of how a cold, cruel heart is made new; how a heart of stone is turned to flesh. While this “Grinch” story is relatively modern, there is another “Grinch” that goes back nearly 2000 years, the Grinch of Doubt. Zacharias was silenced by that Grinch. Doubting God often causes us to silence our witness, worship and faith. Has the Grinch of doubt caused you to go silent? Here are 10 ways you can open your mouth this Christmas:

- 1.) Go Christmas caroling, leave a small gift of Christmas cookies with a scripture
- 2.) Add a lighted Nativity scene to your lawn as a witness of the true meaning of Christmas
- 3.) Bless a struggling family with anonymous gifts. Do it as a family.
- 4.) Visit a Senior Adult home and pass out simple gifts.

- 5.) Invite a single person to join you for Christmas dinner.
- 6.) Invite some kids from the neighborhood over for a Christmas party and share the Christmas story or give them parts and have them act it out.
- 7.) Do something generous and totally unexpected for a neighbor.
- 8.) Have a contest with your children and their friends to write an essay about the “True Meaning of Christmas.” Prepare small prizes for the winners!
- 9.) At dinner each evening, pray for those whose Christmas cards arrived that day.
- 10.) Help a stranger in need.

Remember, faith opens our mouths and unleashes our worship!

DAY EIGHT (December 7)

When Zechariah’s week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home. Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. “How kind the Lord is!” she exclaimed. “He has taken away my disgrace of having no children” . . . When it was time for Elizabeth’s baby to be born, she gave birth to a son. And when her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her, everyone rejoiced with her. When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. But Elizabeth said, “No! His name is John!” “What?” they exclaimed. “There is no one in all your family by that name.” So, they used gestures to ask the baby’s father what he wanted to name him. He motioned for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s surprise he wrote, “His name is John.” Instantly Zechariah could speak again, and he began praising God. (Luke 1:23-25,57-64)

Can you imagine the “talk” Zacharias had with his wife Elizabeth when he returned home? “Zach, what’s wrong with you? Why can’t you talk with me?” He moved his lips, but nothing came out! In frustration, Elizabeth hands him a tablet and he writes, “I’ve got some good news and some bad news . . . you, in your sixties, are going to have a BABY!”

“Have you lost your mind Zacharias?” she exclaimed. And old, silent Zach writes out the story of his angelic encounter: the promise of a son who would be named John; his doubt and its quieting consequences.

How would you respond to unbelievable news like that? Elizabeth’s response was true to the meaning of her name, for “Elizabeth” means “the Lord is an oath or a promise.” So Elizabeth responds, “How kind the Lord is!” God always keeps His promise. Nine months

later she gives birth to a son! Her response shows us that God is faithful to keep His promises, and that waiting on Him—even through long periods of silence or uncertainty—can lead to unexpected blessings.

Elizabeth's story also teaches us that God's timing is perfect. She waited patiently, and when the promise was fulfilled, she recognized it as an act of God's kindness. Her faith and gratitude are a model for us when we face delays or unanswered prayers in our own lives.

DAY NINE (December 8)

Since our journey to Bethlehem has taken us into the home of Zacharias and Elizabeth, let's spend one more day here to discuss the significance of their son John.

On the eighth day after John's birth, Zacharias, filled with the Holy Spirit, held up his son John at his circumcision ceremony and shared a powerful prediction or prophecy:

"And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord. You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins. Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace." John grew up and became strong in spirit. And he lived in the wilderness until he began his public ministry to Israel. (Luke 1:76-80)

Four hundred and twenty-five years before Zacharias made his prophecy, the prophet Malachi foretold of the same messenger of the Messiah who would come. Malachi proclaims these words from God Himself, *"Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," says the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 3:1)*

John was born to fulfill prophecy, to prepare the way for the mission of the Messiah. John would tell people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins. He would tell them to prepare for the visitation of the Sunrise from Heaven, the One who will give light to us who sit in the darkness of sin and death, the One who would shine His glorious light on the pathway to peace with God. That One is Jesus!

We too should join John in telling people how to find salvation and forgiveness of their sins through faith in the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. This Christmas let's give people the greatest gift of all! Let's give them Jesus!

DAY TEN (December 9)

Today we depart from the house of Zacharias and follow the road down to a town called Nazareth. Nazareth was a small village in southern Galilee with a population of only about 500. It was so insignificant in those days that it is not even included in lists of Galilean towns from writers in the first century. This insignificance may explain Nathaniel's disparaging comment, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" (John 1:46)

This humble, disregarded town was the home of Mary and Joseph, "*Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.*" (Luke 1:26-27) It was also the town in which Jesus grew up (Luke 4:16), the starting place of His public ministry (Mark 1:9), and the site of His first rejection by His people, "*So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.*" (Luke 4:28-30)

Jesus was frequently referred to in the Gospels as "Jesus of Nazareth", and the sign Pilate had nailed to the cross read, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."

Matthew 2:23 states that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy, "*He will be called a Nazarene.*" What was Matthew referring to? No Old Testament scripture contains those specific words. Some Bible scholars say the word "Nazareth" comes from the Hebrew word "netzer" which means *branch*. That then would fit perfectly with Isaiah 11:1 which says the Messiah is called a "Branch." The prophet Jeremiah also refers to the Messiah as a "Branch of Righteousness" (Jer.32:14-16).

Nazareth, just an insignificant, tiny branch, but from whom THE Branch of Righteousness would spring forth to save mankind!

If you are drowning in sin, fear, doubt, trouble or despair, reach out and grab The Branch!

DAY 11 (December 10)

Today in our journey to Bethlehem we meet one of the most important people in the Christmas story, Mary.

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored

woman! The Lord is with you! ” Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. “Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!” Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.” The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What’s more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. For the word of God will never fail.” Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” And then the angel left her. (Luke 1:26-38)

There is no more profound encounter in the Christmas story than Mary’s amazing encounter with the angel Gabriel. Coming face to face with an angel?? The Archangel Gabriel?? And him announcing that she will bear the Son of God?? Mind-blowing! How do you respond to that?

Mary’s initial response is one of wonder and confusion: “How can this be?” She is just a teenager, humble, and living in an ordinary town. Yet God chooses her for an extraordinary purpose. Gabriel reassures her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you... For nothing will be impossible with God.”

Mary’s reply is simple yet powerful: “I am the Lord’s servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.” In this moment, Mary models remarkable faith, humility, and surrender to the will of God. She does not fully understand what lies ahead, but she trusts God’s promise.

As we journey through Advent, Mary’s story invites us to respond to God’s call in our own lives with faith, even when we feel unprepared or uncertain. Her willingness to say “yes” to God changed history. What is God inviting you to trust Him with this Christmas season? How can you, like Mary, say, “I am the Lord’s servant”?

DAY 12 (December 11)

Yesterday we read about the amazing encounter Mary had with the angel Gabriel, and how he announced to her that she would become pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit and give birth to the Savior, the Son of God. But there is one BIG obstacle. She is engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. How can she explain this to him, for they had never been together as husband and wife? “I’m pregnant Joseph. Don’t worry, the father is not another

man; it is actually God!” Who would believe that? What will Joseph do? This is shameful news to him.

This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet: “Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’” When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-25)

Joseph’s response to the unexpected news of Mary’s pregnancy offers a profound lesson in trust and obedience. He doesn’t argue, delay, or demand more proof. He wakes up and “did what the angel of the Lord commanded him.” His obedience is immediate and complete. He steps into a calling that would surely bring misunderstanding and hardship, but also deep purpose. Joseph embraces both Mary and the miraculous mystery of Emmanuel — “God with us.”

Joseph models a quiet, deep obedience — one rooted in trust rather than certainty. He reminds us that faith sometimes means taking the next step in the dark, simply because God has spoken.

As we journey through Advent, Joseph’s story invites us to listen for God’s quiet voice amid our own confusion and uncertainty. Are we willing to trust God’s plan even when it disrupts our own? Are we ready to obey, not because we understand everything, but because we believe God is faithful?

DAY 13 (December 12)

Joseph was referred to as a “righteous man” by Matthew. But he would also be known as a *tsaddiyq* (sawd-deek) by his friends and family. That’s a Hebrew word that was reserved for someone who was known for his uncompromising obedience to the Old Testament scriptures. Joseph would have been careful about what he ate, whom he hung out with, and how he spent the Sabbath.

He also had the wonderful benefit of being related to King David and that the Messiah would one day rule on David's throne.

So, Joseph had a lot going for him – a strong faith, a good family, lot of friends, and a strong business. But the best thing was that he was engaged to Mary. What an exciting time of life this was until one day Mary told him they needed to have a serious talk.

She told him that she was PREGNANT! Reeling from this announcement, the only thing he knew was that he wasn't the father. "How could she do this to me? I thought I knew her," he thought to himself. His dreams were dashed like a hammer hitting a jar of clay. His happy expectation of getting married and having a son had turned into a nightmare. Joseph's dreams were destroyed, and he didn't know what to do because he still loved Mary. He was torn between his legal rights and love; between conviction and compassion; between doing what would be right for her and still being a righteous man.

He couldn't stop thinking about this. The Holy Spirit was the cause of conception? Who had ever heard of a virgin getting pregnant? Perhaps that's when the words of Isaiah the prophet shouted in his mind: "*Behold a virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel...*"

Then that night he had a startling, vivid dream in which an angel of the Lord showed up and said: "*Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit [Mary was telling the truth!]. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.*"

As soon as he woke up, he immediately did what the Angel had commanded him. He ran to find Mary and told her they were getting married, right now! Joseph deliberately tied his future, his reputation, his righteousness to Mary and her child, no matter what. Because of his tenacious love for Mary and his wholehearted devotion to the Lord, Joseph gladly took her shame and made it his own.

It's not always easy to do what's right for the sake of the Savior. God may call you to give up your possessions, your place, your position and certainly your pride. Related to this, He often leads us down roads that we wouldn't choose on our own. What are you willing to sacrifice for the Savior? With all He sacrificed for us, how can we not give Him our very lives?

DAY 14 (December 13)

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child. (Luke 2:1-5)

Today we fast forward several months. Mary is getting very close to her due date. But once again, another unforeseen obstacle appears, Joseph and Mary must hastily travel a long dusty road down to Bethlehem, by foot. A journey of over 90 miles! But is this a problem? Or a divine answer to prophecy?

As we continue our journey to Bethlehem, we're reminded that the birth of Jesus was not a random event. It was the culmination of centuries of prophecy, promise, and divine orchestration. God moved the hearts of kings and the course of empires to fulfill His plan of salvation.

The Apostle Paul writes, *"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son..."* (Galatians 4:4). The "fullness of time" was not just a poetic phrase—it was a moment in history when everything was perfectly aligned. The Roman Empire had established roads and a common language, making it possible for the gospel to spread rapidly. The Jewish people were longing for a Messiah, a Deliverer, and the world was ready for hope.

Consider Caesar Augustus, the most powerful man in the world at the time. He issued a decree for a census, requiring everyone to return to their ancestral towns. This seemingly bureaucratic act forced Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem, fulfilling the prophecy of Micah 5:2: *"But you, Bethlehem... out of you will come forth for me one who will be ruler over Israel."* Augustus had no idea he was part of God's plan, yet his actions set the stage for the Savior's birth.

Just as God moved empires and rulers to bring about the birth of Jesus, He is at work in our world and in our lives today. The events that seem random or even inconvenient may be part of a greater purpose. Advent invites us to trust in God's sovereignty, knowing that He is weaving all things together for His glory and our good (Rom.8:28).

Where have you seen God's hand at work in the unexpected circumstances of your life? Think about that and discuss it with your family.

DAY 15 (December 14)

We have arrived in Bethlehem, but our journey is far from over! Today we are introduced to an unnamed but often portrayed character in the Christmas story: the innkeeper.

“And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” (Luke 2:6-7)

The story of Jesus’ birth is familiar to many, yet the figure of the innkeeper is a bit mysterious. Scripture doesn’t give us any details about this person—only that when Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, there was no room for them in the inn. The city was crowded because of the census, every space was taken, and the best the innkeeper could offer was a humble stable, which was probably a small rock cave.

It’s easy to judge the innkeeper for not making appropriate space for the Savior of the world. How could he have known Who Mary was carrying? But if we’re honest, our own lives can become just as crowded—with work, responsibilities, pursuit of pleasure, worries, and distractions. How many times does Jesus comes knocking, seeking a place in our hearts, and we find ourselves saying, “There’s no room”?

Yet, the miracle of Christmas is that Jesus enters the humblest places, not the proudest. He was born in a manger, not a mansion. He seeks not the grandest accommodations, but a humble, willing heart. Many years later, Jesus would say in Matthew 5, “Blessed are the poor in spirit (the humble), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Are our hearts too crowded for Jesus? What “rooms” in our lives are filled with lesser things? How can we intentionally make space for Him—not just during Advent, but every day?

Making room for Jesus might mean reserving time every day for prayer and bible reading, letting go of a grudge and forgiving, or inviting Him into every part of our daily routines. Even if all we have to offer is a humble “stable,” He will enter and transform us with His presence.

DAY 16 (December 15)

This story is too good not to share. Enjoy!

Trouble at the Inn by Dina Donahue

For many years now, whenever Christmas pageants are talked about in a certain little town in the Mid-west, someone is sure to mention the name of Wallace Purling. Wally’s performance in one annual production of the Nativity play has slipped into the realm of

legend. But the old-timers who were in the audience that night never tire of recalling exactly what happened.

Wally was nine that year and in the second grade, though he should have been in the fourth. Most people in town knew that he had difficulty in keeping up. He was big and clumsy, slow in movement and mind. Still, Wally was well liked by the other children in his class, all of whom were smaller than he.

He was always a helpful boy, a willing and smiling one, and the natural protector of the underdog. Sometimes if the older boys chased the younger ones away, it would always be Wally who'd say, "Can't they stay? They're no bother."

Wally fancied the idea of being a shepherd with a flute in the Christmas pageant that year, but the play's director, Miss Lambard, assigned him to a more important role. After all, she reasoned, the Innkeeper did not have too many lines and Wally's size would make his refusal of lodging to Joseph more forceful.

And so it happened that the usual large, audience gathered for the town's yearly extravaganza of crooks and creches, of beards, crowns, halos and a whole stage full of squeaky voices. No one on stage or off was more caught up in the magic of that night than Wallace Purling. They said later that he stood in the wings and watched the performance with such fascination that from time to time Miss Lambard had to make sure he did not wander onstage before his cue.

Then the time came when Joseph appeared, slowly, tenderly guiding Mary to the door of the inn. Joseph knocked hard on the wooden door set into the painted backdrop. Wally the Innkeeper was there, waiting.

"What do you want?" Wally said, swinging the door open with a brusque gesture.

"We seek lodging."

"Seek it elsewhere." Wally looked straight ahead but spoke vigorously. "The inn is filled."

"Sir, we have asked everywhere in vain. We have traveled far and are very weary."

"There is no room in this inn for you." Wally looked properly stern.

"Please, good innkeeper, this is my wife, Mary. She is heavy with child and needs a place to rest. Surely you must have some small corner for her. She is so tired."

Now, for the first time, the Innkeeper relaxed his stiff stance and looked down at Mary. With that, there was a long pause, long enough to make the audience a bit tense with embarrassment.

“No! Begone!” the prompter whispered from the wings.

“No!” Wally repeated automatically. “Begone!”

Joseph sadly placed his arm around Mary and Mary laid her head upon her husband’s shoulder and the two of them started to move away. The Innkeeper did not return inside his inn, however. Wally stood there in the doorway, watching the forlorn couple. His mouth was open, his brow creased with concern, his eyes filling unmistakably with tears.

And suddenly this Christmas pageant became different from all the others.

“Don’t go, Joseph,” Wally called out. “Bring Mary back.” And Wallace Purling’s face grew into a bright smile. “You can have MY room.”

Some people in town thought the pageant had been ruined. Yet there were others—many, many others—who considered it the most Christmas of all Christmas pageants they had ever seen.

May you and I be more like Wally. May we give Jesus our heart, our life, our room.

DAY 17 (December 16)

Today our journey takes us to the outskirts of Bethlehem, on a hillside overlooking the little town. It is night, the stars are shining brightly, and the soft bleating of a herd of sheep make this hillside stop quite peaceful. Let’s spend a few days here, there is much to see and hear.

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”

(Luke 2:8-12)

Imagine what those shepherds must have been thinking in those days: here they were, stuck on a lonely hillside watching a bunch of boring sheep while just right there below them was the busy, festive town of Bethlehem. The town was completely crowded with people. The Romans were busy taking the census, the merchants were preoccupied with their “Black Friday” sales, families were having happy reunions in nearly every home, old friends were getting reacquainted, there was music and dancing and laughter while those forgotten shepherds were stuck in the dark on a quiet hill, crouched around a campfire,

listening to the bleating of sheep, convinced this was the last place on earth where anything remotely exciting could ever happen.

When all of a sudden, they were startled by the sudden, shocking appearance of an angel of the Lord! In a blaze of glorious light, the Angel delivered the greatest news ever trumpeted to mankind! “Today, right there in Bethlehem, the Savior of the world is born!!!”

There they were thinking they were missing out on all the fun and excitement only to find out that the very people they were envying were really those who were missing out! You talk about a life-altering moment!

And the Lord Jesus Christ wants to do the same thing in your life today! You may think that you are stuck in a nowhere place, or a do-nothing job, or unfulfilling marriage, or unhappy family, or meaningless life. But the reality is God wants to do something MEANINGFUL in YOUR life right where you are! He wants to invade whatever situation you are in and pour out His power and purpose and grace on your life. You might respond, “I’m in no position to be used by God or see His power work in and through my life.” Why not? Moses was hiding as a murderer from Pharaoh and tending some sheep when God called him. Gideon was cowering down in a pit, threshing wheat when God invaded his life. Saul was out looking for lost donkeys when God interrupted his life. David was tending sheep, Elisha was out plowing a field, Peter, James and John were fishing, Matthew was collecting taxes and wee little Zacheus was sitting in a tree!

This Advent, let’s open our hearts to God’s surprises and trust that He can use each of us in meaningful ways, right where we are. Just like the shepherds.

DAY 18 (December 17)

Shepherding was a common part of Israel’s history from the beginning. Abraham was a shepherd. Moses cared for the herds of his father-in-law as a shepherd. And King David was a shepherd. In fact, a thousand years before Jesus was born, David was watching sheep in this same area, maybe in the same field. So shepherding wasn’t necessarily a shameful profession, it was just a lowly profession. It was the lowliest of jobs. Shepherds were insignificant. They were uneducated. So, they were really some of the lowest people in their society.

And beyond that, by virtue of the necessity of caring for sheep seven days a week, they lived continuously on some level in violation of Mosaic law. Because of their necessity to work they violated the Sabbath to some degree. So, they were looked down on, not only as socially low, but spiritually low and unworthy. They really were considered the lowest of the

low, unreliable, untrustworthy, and unsavory characters. They were the least likely people in the world you would think God would send angels to proclaim the Savior of the world had been born!

Why make the birth announcement of the Messiah to SHEPHERDS??

God chose the shepherds to reveal the bottomless depth of His grace! Jesus came to SAVE SINNERS! To save the lowly and unworthy. Like YOU and like ME!

Jesus said in Luke 19:10, *“for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”*

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timiothy, *“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”* (1 Timothy 1:15)

The selection of the shepherds and not the kings & princes, rulers & influencers, rich & famous reminds us that God resists and even shames pride, arrogance, ego, superiority, and self-importance, which are characteristics of Satan, the god of this sinful world.

Instead, God embraces the lowly, the unimportant, the humble, the oppressed, and the insignificant according to the world. This is indeed Good News of great joy for all people! Praise God that Christ Jesus came into the world to save shepherds and sinners, just like me and you!

DAY 19 (December 18)

And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid” (Luke 2:9)

Why were the shepherds afraid?

The Shepherds were terrified because they suddenly found themselves in the glorious Presence of God. This was always the reaction of people in scripture. When Isaiah saw God in a vision, he was terrified. He even pronounced a curse upon himself and expected to be immediately incinerated (Isaiah 6). When Ezekiel saw the glory of God in a vision, he fell on his face in a coma (Ezekiel 1). When John the apostle saw the glory of Christ, the Shekinah glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ in Revelation 1 it says he fell over like a dead man, he basically went into a coma. Terror is the result of seeing the holy, glorious presence of God.

But, hallelujah, the angels shattered that terror with the proclamation, *“Do not be afraid! Good news! The Savior has come!”*

You see, the perfectly Holy God is UNAPPROACHABLE for sinful people like you and me. We CANNOT come into His Presence without being annihilated. Our sin must be removed.

Exodus 33:18-20 - *And he said, “Please, show me Your glory.” Then He said, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” But He said, “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.”*

But this is the GOOD NEWS of Christmas: Jesus came to make the unapproachable God approachable! Because of Jesus we can come into His Presence, we CAN see Him without fear!

How does He do this? By His sinless life, and sacrificial, substitutionary death on the cross. A wonderful and glorious transaction takes place via the cross of Christ when I trust Jesus as my Lord and Savior: He takes away ALL my sinful unrighteousness and gives to me all His holy righteousness. Through Jesus I can now boldly enter into the Presence of God with NO FEAR!

Therefore, along with a multitude of the heavenly host we praise God saying: *“Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”*

Like the Shepherds, our fear and terror can become joy and peace because *“there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!”* Hallelujah!

DAY 20 (December 19)

Before we make our way down into Bethlehem with the shepherds to see the baby Jesus, let's talk about the Angels.

Angels are central figures involved in God's plan of redemption for humanity. They are especially central in the birth, life, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. As we are all aware, angels play a huge role in the Christmas story. Let's read about their announcement to the shepherds: *Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in*

swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:8-14)

The scriptures reveal that Angels have at least two very significant roles or ministries: 1.) ministry to the Lord Jesus, and 2.) ministry to His followers, the church.

Although you read of the ministry and appearance of angels throughout the Bible there is no more concentrated record of their ministry than in the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. This makes perfect sense because the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is the greatest event in human history!

As we have already seen, they announced the coming birth of John the Baptist to Zacharias, they predicted His miraculous virgin birth to Mary and Joseph, and they announced it to the shepherds on the Bethlehem hillside.

They also protected the divine Baby from evil Herod by warning and directing Joseph (Matt.2:13,19). They ministered to Jesus in the wilderness temptation (Matt 4:11). They strengthened Him in Gethsemane (Luke 22:41-44). They rolled away the stone at His resurrection (Matt 28:2-3). They announced His resurrection to the women at the tomb (Matt 28:5-7), and they accompanied Him at His ascension (Acts 1:9-11).

So, we see from beginning to end the angels were given a specific ministry to Jesus.

Not only did they have a ministry to the Lord Jesus, but they also have a ministry to His followers, the church. Scripture tells us that angels protect and deliver us (Acts 5,12, 27); they guide believers (Acts 8:26 & Acts 10); they strengthen and encourage us (Acts 5:19-20, Acts 27:22-25); and they have a ministry in the prayers of believers (Rev.8:3-4).

The ministry of angels shows us the amazing extent of God's love and care for us! So, this advent, as we sing Christmas carols about angels, and hang ornaments of angels on our trees, and read of the angel's announcement of the birth of our Savior, let them remind you of just how much God loves you and cares for you. Don't be afraid or hesitant to worship Him, serve Him, follow Him, and live for Him. Look at the Angels! He cares for YOU!

DAY 21 (December 20)

As we hurriedly make our way down into Bethlehem to find the babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, there is another group heading there too who will arrive several months later, the Wisemen. Let's read about them tonight.

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: "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.'" Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. 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." 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. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. (Matthew 2:1-12)

Few biblical stories are as well known, yet so clouded by myth and tradition, as that of the magi, or wise men, mentioned here by Matthew. During the Middle Ages legend developed that they were kings, that they were three in number, and that their names were Casper, Balthazar, and Melchior. Scripture tells us none of this.

What we do know is that "wise men" were widely known about as far back as 600-700 years before Christ. In fact, one prominent group of wise men (magi) are found in the book of Daniel 2:1-2 *"In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. So the king summoned the magicians, enchanter, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. (NIV)*

Daniel became the chief of this class of magi because he correctly interpreted the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams. Descendants of these astrologer/astronomer magi still lived and operated in ancient Babylon and in Persia when Jesus was born. They were not Jews, but Gentiles, pagans. They would, however, have been familiar with Jewish teachings because of the influence of Daniel several hundred years earlier.

Isn't it interesting again today to see who God reveals the birth of Jesus too? These men were not believers in the God of Israel. They saw the light of the star and knew about the prophecies of Daniel regarding a coming King/Messiah, but were not His followers. This reminds us that Jesus came to be *"the Savior of the world"* (John 4:42), that *"whosoever calls upon Him shall be saved."* As one writer on this passage said, "No person who follows

the light God gives him can miss worshiping at the feet of Jesus.” In Jesus Christ *"are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"* (Col 2:3). In Him dwells *"all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"* (Col 2:9). No one is beyond His saving reach!

The Magi followed the light God gave them. The light we have of Jesus today is so much brighter. Will you follow it to worship at the feet of Jesus?

DAY 22 (December 21)

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. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. (Matthew 2:9-11)

Gifts have meaning. Usually, they are chosen specifically for you. Those are the best gifts. The gifts Jesus received also had significant meaning. Many of us know what those gifts were, but we might not know what they represent.

Let's take a closer look at these gifts and discover how their meanings still impact our lives today.

Gold - Why did the wisemen bring Jesus gold? Because the gift of gold is the gift of Kings!

Have you ever noticed how many Christmas carols mention Jesus as King?

♪ Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel, born is the King of Israel.

♪ Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King!

♪ Hark the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

Many Christmas carols refer to Jesus coming as King because the scriptures do.

Jeremiah 23:5 - Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king!

This is the great significance of Jesus coming as King: when you give your life to the King you then receive all the blessings and benefits of the King. All that the King has becomes your inheritance.

Romans 8:16-17 - *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.*

Ephesians 1:3,11 - *All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ . . Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God*

The King showers you with gifts: eternal life, peace, hope, joy, love, forgiveness, meaning, purpose, and value. So, we sing, *“O holy night! The stars are brightly shining; it is the night of our dear Savior's birth. Long lay the world in sin and error pining, Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.”*

King Jesus frees us from our slavery to sin and Satan. The King has come, broken down the gates of Hell, crushed the head of the Serpent, shattered our iron chains of sinful bondage and set us free!! All hail King Jesus, the King of kings!

DAY 23 (December 22)

Today, let's discuss the gift of frankincense. Frankincense is a fragrant resin obtained from trees in the Middle East. So why did the Magi bring frankincense as a gift for Jesus?? What does it represent??

In Exodus 30:34-37 we read, *“Then the Lord said to Moses, “Gather fragrant spices—resin droplets, mollusk shell, and galbanum—and mix these fragrant spices with pure frankincense, weighed out in equal amounts. Using the usual techniques of the incense maker, blend the spices together and sprinkle them with salt to produce a pure and holy incense. Grind some of the mixture into a very fine powder and put it in front of the Ark of the Covenant, where I will meet with you in the Tabernacle. You must treat this incense as most holy. Never use this formula to make this incense for yourselves. It is reserved for the Lord, and you must treat it as holy.”*

Frankincense was the primary ingredient used in sacrifices and worship, the ingredient that most represented the holiness of God. As such, it made the perfect gift to present to God. Jesus was presented with the gift of deity, the gift of worship and holiness because He was God in the flesh, God become man. And only GOD deserves this gift!

Jesus was born, not just a King, but God! God in the flesh! God with us!

So WHY is the deity of Jesus important?? Because you cannot be saved; your sins cannot be forgiven if Jesus did not come as God in the flesh!

Romans 8:1-3 tells us, *“So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin’s control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins.”*

Because Jesus was born in a body like we have, and because Jesus is God come to us in the flesh, the fear of death can be broken in your life, and all your sins can be taken away. Hallelujah what a Savior! Follow the Wise Men to Jesus. Bow down and worship Him. He is God with us!

DAY 24 (December 23)

Tonight, our journey takes us to the final gift of the Magi: myrrh, the gift of humanity. Myrrh, like frankincense, is a fragrant gum resin obtained from small thorny trees . It weeps from the trees as yellowish to reddish-brown lumps called “tears” and has a bitter taste and pleasant earthy aroma.

Myrrh has several uses mentioned in the Bible. It was used in worship as an ingredient for the holy anointing oil. Prophets, priests and kings were anointed with this holy oil of myrrh. The gift of myrrh recognizes Jesus as Messiah, Prophet, Priest, and King!

It was also used in perfume, as an antiseptic for healing, and as an anesthetic to dull pain. Jesus was offered “wine mingled with myrrh” (Mark 15:23) but He refused it so that He would experience complete suffering for our sin. He drank from the cup of suffering so that we might drink from the cup of salvation.

I have small container of myrrh resin that a friend brought me back from the Middle East. I’ve experimented with it by burning it, tasting it (very bitter) and crushing it into powder. I noticed when I crushed it, it released more of its fragrance. When it was crushed . . . I was enriched! How representative this is of Jesus.

The final and most common use of myrrh in the Bible is that it was used to anoint bodies for burial. After Jesus died on the cross, we read from the gospel of John, *“Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.”*

This gift of myrrh foreshadows the death of Jesus.

Did the Magi understand the meaning of what they were giving?? I think they did . . . but even if they didn't, the Holy Spirit led them to give this gift as a sign of the mission of the Messiah, to die for our sins.

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)

Gold the gift of royalty, frankincense the gift of deity, myrrh the gift of humanity. Jesus, even though a King, even though fully God, was also fully man . . . and He died on the cross, was wrapped in a myrrh-infused shroud and buried. He came as King, God and man to give His life for our salvation. Interesting isn't it that our journey to Bethlehem takes us to the cross of Calvary.

DAY 25 (December 24, Christmas Eve)

Whew! I'm nearly out of breath! What a journey this has been. The shocking appearance of the angels, the run down the hillside with the shepherds, and the anticipation of finding a baby, the Savior of the world, wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger has my heart pounding! Our incredible journey is nearly over. We've made it back to Bethlehem! The promised birthplace of the Promised Savior! From His holy mansion in Heaven to a humble manger in Bethlehem. How marvelous!

2 Corinthians 1:20 declares, *“For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ.”*

On this holy night, let's pause to marvel at the faithfulness of God. From the very beginning, God promised a Savior—a Redeemer who would crush the power of sin and Satan, and restore what was broken (Genesis 3:15). Through centuries of waiting, through generations of longing, His people held onto that promise. And tonight, as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, we see the ultimate proof that God never forgets His word.

The manger in Bethlehem is not just a cradle; it is the fulfillment of countless prophecies. Every detail—the virgin birth, the humble setting, the lineage of David—reminds us that God's promises are sure. When life feels uncertain, when prayers seem unanswered, Bethlehem on Christmas Eve whispers this truth: God is faithful. His timing is perfect. His word never fails.

What promise are you clinging to tonight? Maybe it's peace in the midst of chaos, healing for a broken relationship, provision for an unmet need or hope for the future. Let the birth of

Christ assure you: if God kept His greatest promise—the gift of His Son—He will also keep every other promise He has made to you. Our God is a promise-keeping God.

Look! There is the manger! There is the Promise Kept!

DAY 26 (December 25)

Merry Christmas! The King has come! What a thrilling journey this was to Bethlehem. We met so many different people, explored some unexpected places, and saw some unimaginable sights! Let's close our journey today by reading the Christmas story as told by the Gospel of Luke:

And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.

So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them. -Luke 2:1-20