

# The Christmas Story Composition

Advent, Christmas & The Day of Epiphany  
Devotions for Kids and Their Families



Heather Roth Johnson  
EDITOR

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Dedicated to the memory of  
Todd Kempf

DECEMBER 1

# Genealogy

*This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David,  
the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac,  
Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,  
Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,  
Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Aram,  
Aram the father of Aminadab, Aminadab the father of Nahshon,  
Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz,  
whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,  
Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.  
David was the father of Solomon,  
whose mother had been Uriah's wife. . . .*

Matthew 1:1-6a

I love family reunions. Hanging out with all my cousins when I was a child was a blast! I remember a family reunion I went to when I was in third grade. I was running around on the farm where the reunion was being held and an adult asked me “Who do you belong to?” I said, “My mom!” He asked me who she belongs to and I told him, “Grandpa Fuller!” He chuckled and said there were at least a dozen Grandpa Fullers on the farm that day! I ran away very confused that there could be so many Grandpa Fullers at my family reunion. My mom explained that my grandpa’s last name is Fuller, and that it was a Fuller family reunion with many grandpas there who were also called “Grandpa Fuller”. Thankfully, studying Jesus’ genealogy is not as confusing. In fact, you can go to the Old Testament and learn about Jesus’ genealogy by reading stories of Abraham, David, or Ruth. Can you name the people in your family? Do you know their stories? No matter how different our genealogies are, we have one thing in common: we are all God’s children. So, whether you know your entire family history (genealogy) or just a small part of it, you can confidently say you are a child of God. In fact, everyone you meet is a child of God. Which means that every day is like a family reunion. How fun is that?

Heavenly Father, help me remember that I am a part of a family that is much bigger than just the people with whom I live. I will try hard to treat everyone like they are my family. Amen.

# King

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

Matthew 1:6b-11

Kings sit on thrones in palaces. Kings wear royal clothes and crowns. Kings make laws and command kingdoms. Kings get to enjoy the best things the world has to offer. But the weird thing about Kings is they do not often live and work among their people. Jesus' family can be traced back to the great King David. King Jesus is different than earthly kings because he chose to live and work among the people. He was not born in a palace but a lowly stable. He wears a crown, but it is made of thorns. Jesus is the king who guides his people like a shepherd into his kingdom. He forgives us, offers rest to our souls, and promises never to leave us. Storms are silenced by his voice. Evil spirits are cast out with a word. The sick are healed by his touch. When Jesus walked upon the earth he looked like a normal human being. Although we cannot see Jesus with our eyes now, we know he is alive and that he is still the only saving king. As followers of Jesus we are in his kingdom, and his only law was that we love God and one another. If you could be king or queen for the day what would you do? What new laws would you create?

Heavenly Father, we offer praise to Jesus, our King. We look forward to living with him in heaven where he reigns as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Help us to prepare our hearts for advent and the coming of our king. Amen.

DECEMBER 3

# Messiah

*. . . And after the deportation to Babylon:  
Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel,  
and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel,  
and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim,  
and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok,  
and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud,  
and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan,  
and Matthan the father of Jacob,  
and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary,  
of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah. . . .*  
Matthew 1:12-16

Messiah – Wow! What an unassuming word that holds so much meaning. If you Google the word Messiah you come up with “a leader or savior” and “promised deliverer of the Jewish nation.” Those words definitely describe Jesus, who truly was a leader. He set the example of the consummate leader – he was kind, gentle, a wonderful teacher and healer. Jesus was a leader who always put others first and led by example. If you look at the passage, you see the lineage of Jesus. You see all the generations that came before him. I am sure that none of his ancestors knew the Messiah would come from their lineage. Many people today try to trace their lineage to find out where they came from. Previous peoples had to rely on stories that were passed down from generation to generation, family Bibles, and other documents. However, today, to look at your lineage you can easily just Google. You never know what your family history could reveal! Take some time this holiday season to look back at your ancestors. Family gatherings are a perfect time to reconnect and learn more about your past. What type of information would you like to learn about your ancestry?

Lord, we thank you for generations that came before us who followed the Messiah, and we thank you for the Messiah who makes the world a better place for generations to come. Amen.

DECEMBER 4

# Generations

*. . . So all the generations from Abraham to David  
are fourteen generations;  
and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations;  
and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah,  
fourteen generations.*

Matthew 1:17

A generation is all of the people who were born and lived about the same time. You are a generation with your friends, brothers and sisters. Your parents are another generation. Your grandparents are another. Generations are important as we learn from one another. My mother was the first person in my family to graduate from an university. My great-grandmother was 96 and still digging potatoes in the garden. If you go back far enough, one of my great grandparents fought in the Civil War. Before that, many generations ago, my family lived in Germany. The Bible traces Jesus' family back through the generations to teach us something. Jesus was the one who would fulfill the promise made to Abraham that the Messiah would be part of his family line. This proves that Jesus is the one who would come to save the world. No one expected he would die on the cross and rise again but then, that is just how much God loves us and all generations! What is your favorite story about Jesus? Ask three people the same question.

Dear God, thank you for all of the people who lived before me and who are living now and who will live in the future. Amen.

DECEMBER 5

# Birth

*Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way.*

Matthew 1:18

Have you ever seen a newborn baby? When you hold them, they like to snuggle in and cling to you. Or maybe they have a different idea and cry loudly in your ear to get you so that they can go back to their mom or dad. A new baby is a new life in our world. Once we were all brand new babies -- little lives full of the promise of God for the world. But before we were little, snugly, cute, milk-scented babies, we had to go through BIRTH. Birth is hard-work. Birth is a messy process. Birth is never easy. This verse tells us that “the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way.” The same way you were born -- through hard work, through mess and through a process. Isn't that just like God to bring something wonderful like a new life out of the mess? Even Jesus had to go through the birth journey. Sometimes the good things God has planned for us come through hard work, through difficult days, and through a messy process. Our job is to hold on to the promises of God in the tough times. What do you know about your birth story? How has God helped you through the days that are not easy?

Thank you, God, for bringing me into this world through birth and for bringing me into new life in my baptism. Help me Jesus in my hard days. Amen.



DECEMBER 6

# Mary

*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God  
to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,  
to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph,  
of the house of David.  
The virgin's name was Mary.  
Luke 1:26-27*

How many people do you know with the name of Mary? When I was small, I was surrounded by women with the name of Mary. Two grandmothers, a family friend, and even some girls in school. All wonderful, ordinary women. This Mary was ordinary, too – at least as far as we know. There are no descriptions of her beauty, or her intelligence, her faithfulness, or any other great features. And yet, this ordinary, young girl gets a visit from an angel asking her to do remarkable things. Isn't that amazing? God doesn't need people to become extraordinary, God chooses us, takes the best of us, and makes us extraordinary gifts to the world. What gifts do you have to offer? What might God ask you to do to give your gift to the world?

Dear God, thank you for coming to us and asking us to give our gifts to the world. Amen.

DECEMBER 7

# Perplexed

*And he came to her and said,  
“Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”  
But she was much perplexed by his words  
and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.  
Luke 1:28-29*

On October 29, 2012, my family and I were planning for Hurricane Sandy to hit home. Living in a coastal area, hurricanes, tropical storms, winter storms and nor'easters have historically caused flooding and damage in and around my home. That day was a blur as we prepared for Hurricane Sandy to make landfall near us around dinner time. We made sure we had food and water, batteries and flashlights, and charged cell phones. My parents lived in the next town, and we communicated via text. My family and I settled in for bed around 9:30 p.m. At 10:07 p.m., a text from my father read: “Lost power, all is good. Talk to you in the morning.” But what we did not know was that all was not going to be good. Hurricane Sandy had merged with a nor'easter to become Superstorm Sandy. Sometime in the middle of the night the storm breached the barrier island, and the water rushed through the bay causing massive amounts of flooding. The next morning my cell phone lit up with one disturbing voicemail from my parents: “The house flooded. We managed to get to the church to sleep. Call us.” Immediately, we got in the car and headed towards my parents’ home. As a family, we hugged. We cried. We waded through chest-deep water to get to their house and retrieve as many belongings as we could. Days blurred together as there were ten of us living in my brother’s two-bedroom apartment. Eventually the water receded, and the power was restored to our own house. My parents could not go back to their house just yet. Instead, they lived with us for ten months. Holidays and birthdays passed as healing and restoration happened. As a family, we were perplexed on the “How could this have happened?” or “Why us?” or “Where will we go?” or “What to do?” But our faith – knowing God is with us – got us through

those tough months. Have you ever felt perplexed by a situation you were in or by something someone said to you? How did you know God was with you?

Calming Father, be with us this Advent, a time which can be very perplexing. Be a constant presence in our lives and draw us closer to you. Amen.

DECEMBER 8

# Favor

*The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary,  
for you have found favor with God"*

Luke 1:30

When I think of the word "favor," I think of the word "favorite." I am the younger of two daughters, and I like to think I am my parent's favorite child. I tend to be the more adventurous, outgoing, spunky one, and for whatever reason, that equates to being the favorite in my mind! But of course, parents do not have favorites. They love all their children in equal measure. That love might look different for each child, but it is the same, unlimited amount. Mary has found favor with God. She is a favorite, for her faithfulness or willing heart or kind spirit, we do not know. But she is chosen. Selected. Favored by God to bear Jesus, God's Son. Mary might be singled out for a special purpose, but the child she bears comes to show favor to all people. Everything Jesus will say and do, from his life to his death and resurrection, points to this: everyone is favored. Everyone is loved with the same unlimited amount of favor. God's favor, in Jesus, becomes not just for Mary, but for everyone. And this is such good news! What are three traits you possess that you think God especially favors?

God, thank you for taking on our human body and living among us in the person of Jesus, so that we might truly understand you favor and love us all. Amen.

# Name

*And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,  
and you will name him Jesus.*

*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 ancestor David.*

*He will reign over the house of Jacob forever,  
and of his kingdom there will be no end.*

Luke 1:31-33

Name: it is that thing you write on a sticker when you go into a new class or activity. It is that thing that hangs around your neck so other people know who you are. It can be that word that others call you that hurts your feelings. Sometimes it is a way to remember someone important in your family history. My middle name is “Ruth” after my grandmother, who was a woman of deep faith and incredible character. Some names are short and sweet. Some names take some time to unpack and understand. In some cultures, a child’s name says something about when that child was born, or how that child came into the world. Other names have to do with the hopes and dreams the parents have for that child. For example, my friends named their child “Courage.” Names are stories. Names are histories. Names are anticipations and dreams for the future. When the angel told Mary she was going to have a baby, that announcement came with a name: “He will be called...” The name of Mary’s baby would be a connection to God’s faithfulness to the people of Israel. It would be a connection to God’s promise of faithfulness and salvation for all humankind. Jesus is more than a name. It is promise. It is a story. It is a history (path, present and future). It is anticipation and hope. And through this name—Jesus—we receive a name that says more than any other name we can ever be given: beloved child of God. What name most describes who you are and who God is to you?

Dear God, when I am tempted to listen to the names other people call me, help me to hear your voice calling me the name that really matters—your child. Amen.

DECEMBER 10

# Young Person

*Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"*

Luke 1:34

"Ugh, I am so tired of adults!" a young person told me recently. When I asked why, they replied, "They think we kids do not know anything." Ah, the age-old divide between youth and wisdom. Or is it? Earlier today, I heard someone refer to a youth as an "old soul," someone who understands more than his years would let on. Virgin in this text can be taken to mean young, inexperienced, naïve. I do not know many youth today who fit that bill. Students today have tons of experience, online and in real life. They have seen and experienced a plethora of things, for good and for bad. They are some of the fiercest advocates for justice and truth. Youth of Mary's day probably did too. When we hold the annual Christmas program, I find myself reminding whoever Mary is that she is not so different in age than the original Mary. So we might do well to continue to ask how these amazing things can happen with God's power. But let us remember that many times youth are old souls. What can they teach us today?

God, help us see young and old alike as people you love and people who have a special call and purpose in this world. Amen.

DECEMBER 11

# Holy

*The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you,  
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; t  
herefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God."  
Luke 1:35*

Holy from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary means "exalted or worthy of complete devotion as one perfect in goodness and righteousness." A few summers ago, I found myself climbing up to the top of Estes Cone in the heart of the Colorado Rocky Mountains. The more we hiked, the closer I felt to God as God's majestic creation spread out before my very eyes. Near the top of the mountain, I found an altar and cross where I lifted my prayers and concerns to God. It was here that I realized the beauty and holiness of God sending God's one-and-only son Jesus into the world for each and every one of us; God's beloved children. Jesus, the holy one, who continually brings light in the midst of darkness, hope in the midst of despair, and joy in the midst of sadness. Where have you experienced the holiness of God's love for Jesus and all of God's beloved children?

Good and Gracious God, thank you for the gift of your precious and holy son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

DECEMBER 12

# Impossible

*And now, your relative Elizabeth  
in her old age has also conceived a son;  
and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.  
For nothing will be impossible with God.”  
Luke 1:36-37*

The season of Advent might just as well be the season of the (seemingly) impossible. During Advent we wait for a lot of things. We wait for cookies and candles, for trees and tinsel, for family gatherings and gifts. We wait for Christmas, which seems impossible to do!

The season of Advent might just as well be the season of the (seemingly) impossible. Some of us wait for other things: for healing because we are sick; for peace because parents are always fighting; for friends because we sit alone at lunch. What we wait for seems impossible.

The season of Advent tells of Mary's waiting. She is told by an angel that a baby is coming. It seems impossible. She is what, 13? She is not even dating yet, to say nothing of being married. Impossible. The angel seems to know her relative, Elizabeth. The angel tells Mary that Elizabeth is going to have a baby too! Impossible! Elizabeth is much older than Mary, much older. And while she might have always wanted a baby, she has never had a baby, ever! And now in her "old age" she is going to have a baby! Impossible.

But God does, what God does with the impossible. Mary gives birth to the Son of God. Elizabeth gives birth to John the Baptist. We learn that every impossible thing that God makes possible is connected to the love of God for you and the love of God for me. What is something that seems impossible in your life? How can God's love help?

God, we trust your promise of love to believe and receive the impossible. Amen.



DECEMBER 13

# Servant

*Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord;  
let it be with me according to your word."*

*Then the angel departed from her.*

Luke 1:38

We were in the car when a little voice from the backseat asked "Mom and Dad, what do you think God looks like?" Wanting to hear our son's perspective we turned the question back to him, "What do you think God looks like?" He paused for a moment to ponder this mystery. He replied with great thought and conviction, "I am going to say not a potato." We may not know what God looks like physically (probably not a potato, but who knows!). But we see God in the servant hearts and hands of others, the people who share of themselves to let God's love be known. How are you able to be a servant of God, to share God's love in your home, school, or job?

God, help us to be your servants, to show the world a bit of who you are. Amen.

DECEMBER 14

# Engaged

*When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph,  
but before they lived together, she was found to be with child  
from the Holy Spirit.*

Matthew 1:18b

Have you ever been looking forward to something and then plans changed? How did you feel? Maybe you were excited for a vacation and then the car broke down or someone got sick, and suddenly the vacation became a “stay-cation.” Or maybe your plans for a special dinner with your family changed with the addition of a guest? Has someone unexpected ever made their way into your family gatherings? How did you react? Or maybe there was a present sitting under the Christmas tree with your name on it? You hoped and hoped it was something you were wishing for, and on Christmas morning the unwrapping revealed something different, even though it was wonderful and just for you! Mary and Joseph had plans. They had made promises to one another that they would be married, and their family would start to grow. To be engaged was to have hopes and wait together. Suddenly having a baby by the power of God changed those plans for Mary and Joseph. How do you think they felt? What do you think they talked about? What do you think Mary learned about the God who had promised to always be with her? How is God with you, when what you have hoped for starts to look a little different? As we journey in Advent, like Mary and Joseph, may our eyes start to see the unexpected and change as a new way to see God with us.

O God of the unexpected, you know our plans and our hopes. When things change, remind us that you are with us and will show us something wonderful and new. Amen.

DECEMBER 15

# Faithful

*Mary's husband Joseph, being a faithful man  
and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace,  
planned to dismiss her quietly.*

Matthew 1:19

“What is that?” wondered my 4-year-old daughter, pointing to a small, round tin of anointing balm she had noticed on the corner of my desk. “I use it for giving blessings,” I said, “Like this.” We inhaled the sweet lavender scent as I rubbed my finger over the balm and traced a cross on her forehead. I whispered, “You are a child of God.” She smiled and enthusiastically replied, “I want to do you now!” I knelt down and closed my eyes. As I felt her draw a cross for me, I had to restrain a giggle as she said, “You are a grown-up of God.” She is right. I am most certainly a grown up, and yet I strongly believe we are all children of God. When Joseph discovered Mary was pregnant with baby Jesus, he had to figure out the right thing to do and stay faithful to Mary, too. What do you think is more important, to be right or to be faithful?

Dear God, remind us that we are all your family, and it is always right to love you and each other. Amen.

# Save

*But just when he had resolved to do this,  
an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,  
“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife,  
for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.  
She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus,  
for he will save his people from their sins.”*

Matthew 1:20-21

Save. Save the best for last. Save for a rainy day. Wow, that goalie made a great save! Save room for dessert. Save to buy someone you love just the BEST Christmas present ever! Save me from myself. Save for a new car, a new house, college, retirement. Save. We do it all of the time, but really, what is this “save” concept all about? Our earthly attempts at “save” ---saving money, people, time, food, and souls are just a practice run for the ultimate save. While Joseph struggled to save his reputation and wrap his head around the incredible events of the day, along came an angel to remind him that the ultimate save was the baby that was to be born to Mary: Jesus will save his people from their sins. Save my soul! Saved by love. Saved by the very best gift of Christmas. What are you saving for? Who will save you?

Gracious Lord, give us pause in our saving to be reminded that you, indeed, are the ultimate save. Amen.

DECEMBER 17

# Emmanuel

*All this took place to fulfill what had been  
spoken by the Lord through the prophet:  
“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel,”  
which means, “God is with us.”*

Matthew 1:22-23

Emmanuel – of all the random words from the telling of the birth of Jesus, I got this one. The one most meaningful to me, though the friend who assigned it could not have known. “Emmanuel” means “God is with us!” That is why, when we had a baby, almost 40 years ago, the gift of a child was so valuable to us, we named him this, too, Jason Emanuel. We wanted Jason to always remember that God is with us-always, and that he was one of the best gifts to remind us of it. God is with us – Jesus came so we would know that, all of us. What reminds you of God being with you?

Thank you, God, for all the ways you come to us and are with us. Thank you for the birth of Jesus! Amen.

# Sleep

*When Joseph awoke from sleep,  
he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him;  
he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her  
until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.*

*Matthew 1:24-25*

It is amazing that even while we sleep, our mind, body, and spirit are still at work! Sometimes we get a glimpse into this when we wake up and remember a dream we were having. Sometimes our dreams are pretty absurd, and other times it is easy to see how our dreams tie in with real life or a show we watched recently. When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took Mary for his wife. I wonder how he felt when we woke up from that dream! How did he know it was God speaking to him and not a bad sandwich giving him strange dreams? The Holy Spirit still talks to people through dreams, other people, scripture, and our intuition. How would you know if it was the Holy Spirit was speaking to you?

Holy Spirit, we know that you spoke to Joseph and other people in scripture. Helps us to know when you speak to us today. Amen.

DECEMBER 19

# Decree

*In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus  
that all the world should be registered.*

Luke 2:1

“STOP BOSSING ME AROUND!” It seemed that was my youngest son’s most frequent and very loud demand to his older brother. Mary and Joseph and all the citizens of the Roman world were decreed (ordered) by the king (a very powerful boss!) that every person had to return to the place where born to record one’s name (to register) for the purpose of being taxed. Mary and Joseph obeyed the king’s order but it meant a very long trip on foot and donkey (no cars or trains or planes) – and Mary was pregnant. Who orders you around and it seems unfair since they do not really have the authority of a king, or a parent, or a teacher to do so? What do you do when they get bossy?

Dear Lord, help me to not be bossy, but to be a good friend others can trust. Amen.

DECEMBER 20

# Registration

*This was the first registration and was taken  
while Quirinius was governor of Syria.*

Luke 2:2

When I was in college in the 1980's, we began the school year by going to the university gym to register for our classes. Each professor had a table in the room, and they would sit at the tables with their class registration list. Students would run from one side of the gym to the other, from the science department to the music area to the math table and so on. Running around the gym to the most popular classes that were hard to get into was a priority and finding the right place to register was really challenging. There were no computers at that time to make this process easier. As we hurried around the gym from table to table, students tried not to crash into each other in this crazy process of registration. For first time students, this process was chaotic and almost impossible. When it was all over, each student had a list of classes on their schedule that they would attend each day. We knew we belonged. When Jesus was born, his parents had to register for the very first time. Imagine how crazy it must have been to have all the people in the kingdom return to their ancestral hometown and find the right table to fill out their registration form. Mary and Joseph must have felt the chaos among all the people running around, and trying to register. Even so, they must have known God was with them and would keep them safe. They knew they belonged. With God, all things are possible. When have you experienced God in the midst of a crazy time?

God, thank you for being with us in crazy times and letting us know we belong. Amen.



DECEMBER 21

# Census

*All went to their own towns to be registered.*

Luke 2:3

How many people are in your family? A *census* counts all the people in a place, and you just did this! You took your own census! Even during the time of Jesus, the government wanted the people to register so they would know how many people lived in the country. One was taken the year Jesus was born! Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem because that was Joseph's hometown to be counted, to be registered. Can you imagine how hard it was for them to go all that way just before Jesus was born? For Mary and Joseph, the census was about being counted by Caesar Augustus the Emperor of the Roman Empire. God's kingdom also has a census and we are counted in our baptism! It is in our baptism that we are named as a child of God! Take another census: How many people are in your church?

Dear God, we are so thankful to be counted in your kingdom, forever children of God. Amen

# House

*Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea,  
to the city of David called Bethlehem,  
because he was descended from the house and family of David.*

Luke 2:4

Houses hold families, and every household is made up differently. Some houses hold lots of people while others may just have one or two. Some houses do not have any pets while others may have their own zoo. There is one thing that almost all households have: love and belonging. I bet in your house you get to live, play, love, and pray with the people who live in your house and those who you invite in. I remember when my daughter was invited to a friend's house for the very first time. She was so excited but also so nervous. She was worried she would miss being home with her family. She was worried she would not fit in at her friend's house. But she was also excited to get that invitation, to see her friend's house, and play with her friend's toys. In the end, she decided to go and had a great time. She even invited her friend to come to our house for their next playdate. Houses house things; it is the people in them that make them a home. It is the people who share their love, warmth, and help us to belong. It is our job to share our homes, invite others into our space of warmth and love, and freely give what we have to offer. When we do that, we are sharing the love of God with others. Who could you invite to your house today?

God, help us to remember to invite others into our houses and into our lives. Help us to show love to our household and to our neighbor. Amen.

DECEMBER 23

# Expecting

*He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged  
and who was expecting a child.*

*While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.*

Luke 2:5-6

It is interesting really, the flurry of emotions and expectations that come with expecting your first child. There is the awe and wonder that new life is about to be birthed into this world. There is terror and confusion of what that birthing process is actually going to be like. Mostly though, it is the dreaming, hoping and planning for this new little relationship that is coming your way. Before my son was born, I remember feeling as though I had to research everything, understand it all, and make sure that everything was perfect for this squishy little eight pound, six ounce wailing bundle to arrive. And yet, once he got here, my expectations did not match the reality. Real life babies have a mind of their own, Dr. Google isn't always very helpful, and even the best advice can make you spin in circles. I finally figured out that I had to let go of thinking there was only one correct way to care for an infant and to focus on the new life right in front of me. Maybe that is the secret to expectations -- they lead you somewhere and become something completely different by the time you get there. What expectations need to change, so that there may be new life?

Loving God, ease my expectations of the world around me, so that I may live fully as the beloved child that you have created me to be.  
Amen.

DECEMBER 24

# Bands of Cloth

*And she gave birth to her firstborn son  
and wrapped him in bands of cloth,  
and laid him in a manger, because  
there was no place for them in the inn.*

Luke 2:7

Bands of cloth swaddle newborn babies whose families do not own spare blankets. Bands of cloth are quilted together to provide window shade or to hang on walls to keep out the draft. Bands of cloth are used by people to bandage old wounds and weave new threads into the tapestry. When my sister was born, we were delighted at the sight of her pink face, snuggled up with a soft new blanket. The original print of yellow little ducks has long since faded, worn grey by love. But even if they had first wrapped my baby sister in a potato sack, they could not make her any less treasured. Jesus' family at the manger -- and even visitors from faraway places --knew how precious Jesus was. Even if there was no room in the inn or even though he had no fuzzy ducky blanket but only bands of cloth to be wrapped up in, Jesus was treasured by Mary. What or who do you treasure?

Generous God, teach us your ways so that all of your children, newly born or having long since greyed, can sleep swaddled in comfort and love. Amen.

DECEMBER 25

# Good News

*In that region there were shepherds living in the fields,  
keeping watch over their flock by night.  
Then an angel of the Lord stood before them,  
and the glory of the Lord shone around them,  
and they were terrified. But the angel said to them,  
“Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you  
good news of great joy for all the people:  
to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,  
who is the Messiah the Lord.”*

Luke 2:8-11

With all the advancements in social media and technology we no longer need to wait for the 10:00 news anchor to expose the “bad news” of the day developing both locally and globally. We are bombarded with news of violence, natural disasters, the derailment of relationships, and deaths almost simultaneously with their occurrence. Many individuals feel the weight of struggles and sorrow in their own lives without the additional burden of stress we are confronted with by instant exposure to worldwide suffering. The noise of the bad news in daily life often drowns out the good news surrounding us. In the Christmas story, Luke uses the voice of an angel to rise above the noise of the world to share the good news -- born that day was a Savior, the Messiah, the Lord! This news spread without any modern technology but just imagine if those shepherds had cellphones? What would their Instagram posts look like? Maybe something like: “An angel shining with the glory of the Lord and speaking to commoners!” The good news for us is this message was not just intended for the shepherds who actually heard it but the angel brought “good news of great joy for all people.” The Savior was born for everyone. Jesus came not to take all the bad news away but to help guide us through the noise of daily life. With him, we can hear the voice of salvation whether it comes as a quiet whisper or with a

multitude of the heavenly hosts! How will you help others hear the good news of Jesus over the commotion of the holiday season?

Savior, thank you for entering this noisy world with good news filled with the message of love and salvation. Help us to share it with others just as the angel shared with the shepherds. Amen.

# Sign

*“This will be a sign for you:  
you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth  
and lying in a manger.”*

Luke 2:12

Each year our family takes a trip to family camp in Colorado. We look forward to this trip all year. On Memorial Day weekend, the kids make a paper chain to count the days until we go to camp. As we remove the links each night, the shorter chain is a sign that our time at camp is drawing near. We wait with excitement. The shepherds in Luke 2 were also waiting and watching with excitement. They had been promised a Savior, someone who would forgive them and change their world. As they lay in the grass, watching their sheep, angels appeared and told them that this Savior had been born! The promise had come true! Their sign would be a baby. This tiny baby was the sign of God’s great love for them. The baby was a sign that God was with them. They had waited so long for this Savior! For what are you waiting? What helps you to wait?

Dear God, thank you for reminders of your great love for us. Amen.

# Glory

*And suddenly there was with the angel  
a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying:  
“Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”*

Luke 2:13-14

One dictionary definition for glory is worshipful praise, honor, and thanksgiving. Another definition is a ring or spot of light...like a halo or glow. I am fascinated by sunlight playing in the trees. Sometimes the light seems to make the leaves sparkle. I also enjoy taking photographs and I often try to capture the sunlight in the trees. There are times when the captured light falls just right and the highlighted leaves just glow. When I see this, it is as if what is highlighted is reflecting the light back in praise of God and in thanksgiving for what God has created – pure glory! In what ways do you offer praise, honor, thanksgiving...give Glory . . . to God?

Glorious God, may our lives reflect our praise and thanksgiving for your goodness and generosity. Amen.



# Found

*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven,  
the shepherds said to one another,*

*“Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place,  
which the Lord has made know to us,”*

*So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph,  
and the child lying in the manger.*

Luke 2:15-16

At a recent outing with my family, my second son did not notice that the family was moving along to the next destination. We were at a very busy festival, and he wanted to play in the sprinkler some more. When he had turned around, he noticed that he was alone. At the same time, some festival employees found him and helped him to the customer service booth. His father and I noticed that he was not with the group. Out of a family of six children, this son normally stays close. As you can imagine, we were all very concerned. His father went to look for him. I was left with the other five children. We went and found a security guard. He told us that lost children taken to the customer service booth. With all the speed I had in me with five kids in tow, we made our way to the front of the festival. My husband arrived ahead of us and already found our son. Tears of relief and feelings of thankfulness filled our hearts as we hugged together. In the Bible verse, the shepherds ran as fast as they could to the stable. There, they found Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus. Being found is the best feeling in the world. Have you ever missed someone or went missing? How did you feel when you were found?

Creator God, when we are lost please help guide us. May we always be found in your grace and love. Amen.

DECEMBER 29

# Amazed

*When they saw this, they made known  
what had been told them about this child;  
and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.*  
Luke 2:17-18

Have you ever watched a child as they watch their first fireworks display? The child has complete and total amazement! When my daughter was four, we stayed after a baseball game for the Friday night fireworks. It was late – well past bedtime – but we figured it was just as easy to stay as to fight the traffic leaving the stadium. While most people were focused on the pyrotechnics over the Detroit skyline, I was captured by her face. Amid all the flickers of light, crackling explosions, and the faint scent of smoke, her eyes were open wide. She was more than just interested. It was beyond excitement or even fascination. She was filled with complete and total amazement – and she was not afraid to tell everyone she met for the next several days about what we saw in the dark after the baseball game ended. Everyone needed to know how amazing her experience had been. Her wonder and awe for a new experience was contagious. Every time she told the story, you could see a piece of that same amazement on the face of the listener. Her joy spread to each person who heard it. When we share our amazement, we cannot help but bring joy to those who hear it! The shepherds were like my four year old, simply amazed. So amazed that they had to share the news of Jesus. What amazes you? Something so amazing you have to tell others about it?

Lord, may we always find your love so amazing that we can't keep it to ourselves. Amen.

# Treasured

*But Mary treasured all these words  
and pondered them in her heart.*

*The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God  
for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

*Luke 2:19-20*

I do not know anyone who enjoys going to the dentist. But my childhood dentist was wonderful and caring; he made my twice yearly visits both tolerable and rewarding. Dr. Mayberry was patient and funny; he knew about my hobbies and interests, and he always asked about school, summer camps, and family vacations. But the very best part of every visit was picking a “treasure” from the treasure chest in the hallway before leaving his office. That big wooden treasure chest held books, stuffed animals, school supplies, t-shirts, hats, gadgets and gizmos. No candy, of course! There were so many choices that it was difficult to pick just one treasure to take home, especially when you were old enough to know that in six months the treasures within would be completely different. Many many years later, I cannot tell you what I carried home, but I do know how treasured I felt after each visit to the dentist. Have you every picked a “treasure” from a “treasure chest?” If so, how did that make you feel? Mary has given birth to the greatest treasure of all time, baby Jesus, and the shepherds and angels have worshiped and praised the newborn king. Mary will forever remember their praises and treasure them in her heart. What are somethings that you treasure?

God, help us to see each day as a day to treasure. Amen.

# Wise Men

*In the time of King Herod,  
after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea,  
wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking,  
“Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?  
For we observed his star at its rising,  
and have come to pay him homage.”  
Matthew 2:1-2*

When I think of wisdom, one of the first images that comes to mind is that of the very small, very wrinkly, very green...Yoda. Yoda, throughout the original Star Wars trilogy, said many profound things, and showed great patience with his “young padawan.” One of his most beloved quotes was “*Truly wonderful the mind of a child is.*” The wise men also showed great patience as they travelled a very long distance to meet their young king, and I wonder if they shared the same sentiment about the mind of *this* child. Truly wonderful this newborn child is. Truly *wise* this newborn child is. Sometimes wisdom is found in the very old, wrinkly, and green. Sometimes it is found in the young, wide-eyed, and exuberant. Who brings wisdom into your life? Can you think of someone old and someone young?

Dear young, wise Savior: We are filled with joy at your birth and are eager to learn more about you. Fill us with the wisdom to always seek your will, and the patience to wait for your replies to our prayers. Amen.

JANUARY 1

# Inquire

*When King Herod heard this, he was frightened,  
and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together  
all the chief priests and scribes of the people,  
he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.*

Matthew 2:3-4

I have been surrounded by young children my whole life. I am an older brother and cousin, grew up in a “daycare house,” have spent over a decade in youth ministry, and as I write this reflection, my wife and I are expecting the arrival of our first child. And we are braced for that old, classic question: “Why?” Kids are some of the most inquisitive people, aren’t they? They are asking all sorts of questions— “Why do I have to go to bed?” and “Why do I have to wear clothes?” and “Why does the sun move?” Childlike inquisitiveness can get tiresome to parents sometimes, but this spirit of questioning and piecing our world together— bit by bit— is our human nature; we never stop inquiring, wondering, and asking questions. And hopefully when we inquire at any stage of life, we are ready to listen as carefully as preschoolers. Because adults sometimes forget to listen for the sake of understanding, and only really listen to react or respond. In this Gospel narrative, King Herod is not trying to understand, and he is not awestruck like the wise men and shepherds; he is instead trying to hoard his own power, and protect himself from a foreign child; from a newcomer; from God breaking into our real world. How do the questions you ask change when you are afraid, versus when you are curious?

O God, help us to ask questions out of curiosity instead of fear, and help us to trust that your presence in our community is truly a blessing, and not a threat. Amen.

JANUARY 2

# Prophet

*[The wise men] told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea;  
for so it has been written by the prophet:  
‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”*  
Matthew 2:5-6

Herod was threatened by the birth of this baby king—so threatened that he sought out more information. “Where was he born? Who is this ‘king’?” The chief priests and scribes didn’t hesitate: “He was born in Bethlehem.” They knew and believed this because this is what the prophet Micah had said. Prophets in the Old Testament foretold the future and the truth about God. If the prophet said it, they believed it—as simple as that. Bethlehem was a small, insignificant town; flyover territory, we would say today. It seemed unlikely that such a world-shattering event would happen in Bethlehem. But the prophet said it, so the religious leaders believed it. Sometimes we might feel like that little town of Bethlehem: insignificant, small, and unimportant. But through the birth of Jesus, we are called to be so much more. What would a prophet say about you and the story you are meant to tell about Jesus?

Jesus, let my life be significant, and let my life tell the story of your birth. Amen.

JANUARY 3

# Homage

*Then Herod secretly called for the wise men  
and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.*

*Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying,*

*“Go and search diligently for the child;  
and when you have found him, bring me word  
so that I may also go and pay him homage.”*

Matthew 2:7-8

I remember when I was a little kid, and I thought the king told the wisemen that he wanted to pay HOMEage to baby Jesus. I heard my parents talking about the mortgage payment so I thought I would have them explain it to me. My dad told me it was money they got from the bank to pay for the roof over our heads. It made me think of baby Jesus not having a home, so I asked them if we could pay the HOMEage for baby Jesus or have him come live with us. My dad explained that “homage” meant honor, respect and worship. It really meant a lot to me because it helped me realize that Jesus is always with us and deserves our homage – honor, respect, and worship - every day. Welcome to our home Jesus! What can you do to pay homage to Jesus?

Dear Jesus, help us to give you honor and praise every day. Amen!

JANUARY 4

# Stars

*When they had heard the king, they set out; and there,  
ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising,  
until it stopped over the place where the child was.*

Matthew 2:9

Have you ever wanted to be a star, maybe an Olympic athlete or a famous actress or a pop singer? What do you think it would be like? We often think of stars as people who get lots of attention, have lots of money and a glamorous life. But I wonder if that really is what it means to be a star? Think about the stars in the night sky. For thousands of years, travelers have used those stars to help guide them and give them direction. Before compasses or cell phones or GPS, people used the stars to figure out where they were and where they were going. Two thousand years ago, some very wise people saw one special star in the sky and used it to guide them to the baby Jesus. If you want to be a star, maybe you can be like that star and help people to find Jesus by inviting them to church, by showing them the love of God, or even just a little kindness when they need it. Would you like to be that kind of star? That's the kind of star that the world really needs.

Dear God, thank you for sending the star that guided the wise men to the baby Jesus. Help us to shine like stars and guide people today to Jesus and to your love. Amen.



JANUARY 5

# Overwhelmed

*When they saw that the star had stopped,-  
they were overwhelmed with joy.*

Matthew 2:10

Have you ever felt so overwhelmed you thought you would burst? This summer, I planned and led two youth trips: one to Houston, Texas and one to New Haven, Connecticut, I drove across the country from Connecticut to Wisconsin and back two times. During one of those drives, I lost one of my closest friends. You could say I felt overwhelmed! But this is not the same “overwhelming” sensation the wise men describe in the Bible verse. The wise men could not believe they were about to meet the king, the real King. For them, being overwhelmed was joy-filled moment. Whether you feel overwhelmed with joy or stress or sadness or love, remember that you can turn to God in prayer in each of those times, and God will always hear you.

Dear God, help remind me to open my heart to you in times of joy and pain and know that you will always be listening. Amen.

JANUARY 6

# Gifts

*On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother;  
and they knelt down and paid him homage.*

*Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him  
gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

*And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod,  
they left for their own country by another road.*

Matthew 2:11-12

What is more fun than opening gifts? Shiny paper, big bows, lots of tape, and under it all awaits a surprise. A thoughtfully chosen gift can convey a message of love, of thanks, of joy, and of celebration. My family teases me that my official love language is “being thought of,” but of the actual love languages mine is “receiving gifts”. Nothing makes me feel more cared for than a thoughtfully-chosen gift. I love giving gifts as well – so much that I have a spreadsheet of the gifts in my stockpile (no, I am not kidding)! The wise men presented Jesus with such precious and beautiful gifts – and they did not have a spreadsheet to direct them! While their gifts were incredibly valuable and costly, they knew that they paled in comparison to the gift God had just sent to the world. That Gift, born in a manger under the Bethlehem sky, was truly priceless. May we enjoy the gifts we have recently unwrapped, appreciate the blessing of giving someone else a beautiful gift, and give thanks for the greatest Gift of all – Jesus. What is the best gift you have ever given or received? What made it the best?

Lord, thank You for the gift of your son, Jesus. That gift is everything to us. Amen.

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