



THE .  
*PROMISE*  
KEPT

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE



A night sky filled with stars, framed by the dark silhouettes of trees at the top. The text is written in a white, elegant cursive font across the middle of the image.

*A Letter From The Pastor*

DEVOTIONAL FOR ADVENT WEEK #1

# Joseph Heard an Angel

My name is Joseph. Will you hear what I heard? I still hear the sound of the voice of that angel as he spoke to me in the night. He knew that I was afraid. How did he know? He identified fear as the real reason I was planning to put Mary away, to end my marriage plans. I was afraid of what people would think, afraid of what my family would say, afraid of looking like a fool. I was afraid of what I could not explain and did not understand. Oh, I wish you could hear the voice of an angel saying, "Do not be afraid."

I heard the angel describe Mary's pregnancy as a miracle of the Holy Spirit. Now, I am a simple man. I certainly do not claim to understand how the Holy Spirit could move upon a virgin to cause her to conceive, but I believed that He could, if that was His plan. I believed the story Mary told me. I believed the angel's simple statement of fact: "Nothing is impossible with God." Since I believed, I obeyed. I wish you could have heard Mary's grateful cry of relief when I told her that I would take her and the child as my own.

I want to make sure that you hear what the angel told me about this child. I know these words because I have often thought about them. I named the boy Jesus. Much of the time in the midst of our daily routine His name was just a name to me, a name I used thousands of times. But as the child grew, that name would sometimes take me back to the night the angel spoke. I heard him say

something remarkable: "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Do you hear what I hear?

Most people know that we need a Savior. We need someone to intervene on our behalf. People call for deliverance from poverty, rescue from oppression and remedy for the ignorance and injustice that trouble our world. I heard the angel declare a deeper truth. Our problem is sin. Jesus saves us from sin.

Down through the years I have reflected on what I heard the angel say about Jesus that night. The pronouns pop. "He will save." Joshua was a name that declared, "Yahweh is Savior." The angel said something greater about Jesus. Who will save? "He will save." Jesus Himself is the Savior of His people. And notice another pronoun, "He will save His people from their sins." Everyone wants to be saved from the sins of the world, the sins of society, the sins of the nations or their neighbors. The angel's announcement spoke of something more personal. He came to save you from your sins. He came to save me from my sins.

Sometimes people speak to me as if I rescued Mary and her son. They were desperate, without hope or help, until I rose to the occasion and saved them. If you don't hear anything else I have said, hear this: Jesus saved me from my sins.

*Matthew 1: 18-25; Luke 2: 26-38; Colossians 1: 19-23*

# Family

## CONNECTION

### ASK EACH FAMILY MEMBER:

- › Do you like to dream when you sleep?
- › Do you remember your dreams?
- › Have you ever awakened laughing from your dream?

Joseph had a dream, and it was very real because God was giving him some very important instructions. Ask the family to cover their eyes and imagine Joseph's dream (read the following statements slowly, giving time to imagine). Joseph was to take Mary as his wife and name the baby, "Jesus" because He is the Son of God. Joseph was a special man because he was chosen by God for a task that would affect everyone including you and me.

### THINK ABOUT IT:

If Joseph had not obeyed God, things might be a lot different for us today. He wasn't sure about the task the angel was asking him to do, but he didn't need to have all the answers. He only needed to obey. We often think finding the will of God is like a maze, but it is not. It is a clear path (Proverbs 3:5-6). Quit trying to figure everything out and simply trust God like Joseph did.

## DEVOTIONAL FOR ADVENT WEEK #2

# I Know Immanuel

My name is Matthew. Do you know what I know about Jesus? When I wrote my gospel account of the birth of Jesus, it was important for me to make this observation: “They shall call His name Immanuel, which translated means, God with us.” Of course, this is a part of Isaiah’s prophecy; but, it is also a reality I have experienced first hand.

The name Immanuel makes a claim about the person of Jesus. Jesus is God incarnate. In the person of Jesus, God became a man. The fact that Jesus of Nazareth was born of the virgin Mary is a miracle of God Almighty. In Jesus, God has intervened on our behalf. Jesus demonstrates that God is not unmoved or removed from our struggles or sorrows. He is present and He understands. He can sympathize with our weaknesses.

The name Immanuel makes a claim about the purpose of God. In Jesus, we learn that God has purposed to help us. He cares. Even though we are damaged by sin, He values us. Even though we are hostile toward Him, God comes for us, to rescue us. Jesus demonstrates the love of God for us. Because of Jesus we have confidence that

God will help us; He has helped us. He has intervened on our behalf.

In my mind the name Immanuel proclaims two miracles. The incarnation is a miracle – that God could become a man. This is marvelous in my mind. Yet, there is something even more marvelous to me. I call it the miracle of God’s inclination – that God would become a man because He loves us. He emptied Himself of glory so that He might fill us with His grace. Jesus is Immanuel.

I was sitting in my tax collector’s booth when Jesus came to me. I had betrayed my country and my kin for wealth. People avoided me as a traitor, a sellout. Nobody wanted to be seen with me, few dared even to talk to me. I imagined that even God hated me. Jesus called me. He came to my house and ate with me. Jesus showed me that God has compassion for sin-sick people. He is not against us, He is for us. He does not avoid us, He is present. Jesus is Immanuel.

*Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail th’ incarnate deity; Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Immanuel.*

***Matthew 1: 22-23; Matthew 9: 9-13; Luke 2: 8-14; Hebrews 4: 14-16***

# Family

## CONNECTION

### PLAY THE GAME 2 TRUTHS 1 FALSE:

Ask each person to write down and read three statements about yourself. Two of the statements are true and one is false. After each person reads their statements, the family guesses which are true and which is false. Statements might include favorite foods, toys or hobbies from childhood, or people you have met. Feel free to be creative and even ridiculous. Enjoy some laughs!

Some people make poor choices in their life that leave them ashamed. Some people believe harsh words spoken about them although there is no truth in those words. Some people just don't know Jesus' love and don't feel loved by anyone. Matthew made some poor choices until he met Jesus. Because of Jesus' love and acceptance, Matthew gave up everything to follow and serve Jesus.

### TELL ABOUT YOU:

When did you hear about Jesus' love? What happened when you decided to follow Jesus and make Him the boss of your life? Share that experience with your family.

## DEVOTIONAL FOR ADVENT WEEK #3

# Worship the King

My name is Melchior\*. I wish you could see all that I saw. I saw a star. I had studied the night sky all my life. The planets and stars fascinated me. I appreciated all their beauty and brightness. This star, however, was unlike any other. I understood it to be a sign that the King of the Jews had been born.

Centuries before I lived, before this King was born, a prophet named Balaam spoke about the distant future. "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; a star shall come forth from Jacob, a scepter shall rise from Israel." This prophecy is one of the reasons I believed the magnificent star would guide us to a magnificent new King.

Following the star, seeking the King, we came to Jerusalem. When we arrived in the city we asked anyone who would listen where the new King could be found. They were totally ignorant. They had eyes to see, but they could not see. He was their King, but they couldn't care less. We had travelled across a continent, but they would not even take the afternoon off to consider our claims. Finally, we came to King Herod's attention. He searched the Scriptures and sent us to Bethlehem.

Bethlehem seemed like an odd place for a King. But that is where we found Him. Even as we set out from Jerusalem, the star went on to guide us. Finally, finally, we found the house. In the house we found Mary and with Mary we found the child, Jesus.

We brought gifts for Jesus. We presented to Him some of our greatest treasures. Gold is a gift suitable for a king. Its beauty and value reflects his glory. Frankincense produces the aroma of worship. It represents the work of a priest. Myrrh is used to care for the dead. Our three gifts said more than we could understand at the time. This King is a priest who would die for our sins.

When I found the new King I fell on my face. I was convinced that He was more than the King of the Jews, He was the King of all nations. He was my king. Somehow, He deserved more than my loyalty; He deserved my worship. I was humble and broken; yet I fell on my face with great joy in my heart. Some saw only a little boy in that humble house in Bethlehem; I saw the King of Kings and the hope of all nations.

\* The wise men or Magi are not numbered or named in the Bible. Melchior is a name tradition gives to a magi that dates back to the sixth century.

*Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! Bow down before Him, His glory proclaim;  
With gold of obedience and incense of lowliness, Kneel and adore Him: the Lord is His Name!  
Fear not to enter His presence in poverty, Bearing no gifts to present as your own.  
Bring truth in its beauty, and love in its purity These are the offerings to lay at His throne.*

*"Worship the Lord" words by John Monsell and David Steele.*

***Matthew 1: 22-23; Matthew 9: 9-13; Luke 2: 8-14; Hebrews 4: 14-16***



# Family

## CONNECTION

### MAKE A STAR

Idea options: Draw a star with one continuous line never raising the pen from the paper. Make star shaped sugar cookies from refrigerated cookie dough or from scratch. Use pipe cleaners to bend a star shape then add them to the Christmas tree as ornaments. Provide play dough to let every family member make a star.

### ASK:

- › When Jesus was born, why did God provide a star?
- › Do people still look for Jesus?
- › What makes people think they should look for Jesus?

### EXPLAIN:

Our lives are like a star. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). When we ask Jesus to forgive our sins and follow Him, we look different. How do we look different? Our life is motivated to serve Jesus and live a life of obedience so everyone who sees and knows us will know we follow Jesus. The light of Jesus is in us, and others are drawn to it and want it too. This means you are like a STAR! You show others how to find Jesus. How brightly are you shining?

## DEVOTIONAL FOR ADVENT WEEK #4

# Exposed

My name is Herod, King Herod. Will you do what I did when I heard Jesus was born?

The news of Jesus the King troubled me. I knew about the Messiah who had been promised by the prophets. They wrote of a true Son of David, a perfect Shepherd King anointed by God to bring peace and justice to His people and to extend His glorious rule over the nations. But the thing is, the Jews already had a king—me. I did not plan to worship Jesus. I would wipe Him out!

The wise men wised up. They left me in the dark. Oh, I was crazy mad! I sent my men to Bethlehem on a search and destroy mission. They searched and could not find; but they could still destroy. We eliminated every possible threat. Collateral damage is the cost of doing business for a king like me.

I rejected Jesus. The possibility of bowing to Him never really entered my mind. It was either Him or me because I would die before I gave up my throne. The testimony of the wise men and the witness of the Scriptures do not change this simple reality: The kingdom cannot have two kings.

I rejected Jesus to preserve my own rule. No one can rival me. I make the rules. I am the boss, and I tolerate no other authority. Except, of course, for Caesar; Caesar is Lord. Rome is the ultimate authority. I know that I am not actually sovereign. I rule at Caesar's pleasure, as

long as Caesar is pleased. I guess maybe there can be two kings – a big king and a little king, the real king and a pretend king. OK, I know, I never really did rule as a sovereign king. I preferred to serve Caesar than to serve Jesus.

I rejected Jesus to preserve the status quo. You know, the status quo, the state of affairs, the current status... the way things are. I tried to kill Jesus because I liked the way things were. Well, I didn't really like life. Most of the time I was miserable, paranoid and petty; but, it was all I knew and I feared anything different. This Jesus might mess things up. He could make things worse. I decided to hang on to life as I knew it. I wanted King Jesus to go away and leave me alone.

Truth is, I rejected Jesus because He exposed me. He is the promised One, and I was a pretender. He is the Son of David, and I was an Edomite. He is a Shepherd King who cares for the flock and lays down His life. I abused the people of God and would never sacrifice anything for them, especially not my own life. He is everything that I am not. I am darkness, and He is the Light. I could not embrace Jesus without exposing myself.

There cannot be two kings. One of us had to be broken. I thought it would be Him. It turned out to be me.

*Matthew 2: 1-20; John 1: 1-13; John 3: 17-21*

# Family CONNECTION

## PRETEND PLAY

Give each family member a part to play in the Christmas story. Parts might include Mary, Joseph, Baby Jesus, (if there is no baby in your family you can substitute with a doll or a pet- we are just pretending so laughter is great), donkey, inn keeper, angel(s), and shepherds. Provide towels and other costume needs for the play.

The narrator can read Luke 2 from the Bible. Invite everyone to play their part of the story in the area designated as the stage. Consider video recording the play to watch later!

## APPLAUD THE GREAT PERFORMANCE!

In the play you were pretending to be someone you are not. Like Herod, some people pretend they are king of their life, but miss what life can really be. They are empty since they do not know Jesus. Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing." John 15:5

The problem is, most people are searching and filling their life with substitutes instead of the real life Jesus offers. Maybe they don't know about Jesus. We can tell them. Maybe they do know Jesus and still choose to fill their life with substitutes instead of giving up their life and truly following Christ. Where are you? Are you pretending or are you a true follower of Jesus?



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