

# **Advent**

*a transformation journal*

November 27 – December 25

**THIS JOURNAL  
BELONGS TO:**

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# ABOUT THIS JOURNAL

We're so honored that you're starting on this transformation journey with us! It's our wholehearted belief that the daily discipline of time in the Word and with God is a key element to building our spiritual muscles and help us become strong disciples. We believe and have seen it lived out that the daily discipline of devotion to God can help people become more fully who God created them to be.

With that in mind, we hope that each and every one who picks up this journal will be challenged and encouraged.

**EACH DAY** there's a daily scripture reading, space to write out your thoughts and a short devotional to encourage and motivate you throughout your week.

Remember to pray before you begin and ask God to bless you with insight and discernment as you reflect and respond.

Journeying with you,  
The Adult Discipleship Team



**READ:** Matthew 1:1-17

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## reflection

The introduction to the Gospel of Matthew provides a detailed genealogy of Jesus Christ. At first glance, this seems to be a simple overview of Jesus' family tree, but in first-century Jewish culture one's identity was deeply rooted in one's family line or tribe. "Who you were" in the social hierarchy depended a great deal on "who you were from," and in Matthew we learn that Jesus descended from royalty. While family still plays a big part in our social identity today, we have new layers that seem even more important. How often do we see ourselves as the neighborhood we live in, the school we attend, the job we hold or the social group we are part of?

Although our family tree may not descend from kings or queens, the good news of the gospel assures us we are beloved sons and daughters of the living God! How much greater is an identity rooted in the knowledge that we are part of one family, one body, in Jesus Christ?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us to remember who we are and whose we are. Let us live out an identity grounded in the knowledge that we are your sons and daughters now and in eternity. Amen!

*-Cristen & Nathan Gildow*

**READ:** Luke 1:27

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## reflection

I've heard Joseph referred to as Jesus' stepfather. That's the wrong label, to my thinking. Joseph was the only father Jesus knew on Earth. He surely influenced Jesus in mighty ways. Joseph married Mary and gave Jesus his name. In fact, it's Joseph's lineage we read in Matthew 1. Joseph protected Jesus and took him to Egypt, sparing his life. Joseph taught Jesus the skills of carpentry, his craft and livelihood. Joseph was Jesus' dad. Many people have the influence of more than one father in their lives. Author Ann Patchett writes a fascinating essay about the diverse influence of her three fathers that you can check out here: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/10/05/my-three-fathers>

Earthly fathers, whether acquired at birth or later, give us many gifts. They give us physical examples of how to live. They give us advice, assurance, and something solid to hold onto. They provide comic relief, humor in a sometimes overly serious world. Earthly fathers sometimes make mistakes, and give us implied permission to make and recover from our own mistakes.

What did you learn from your earthly father?

How can you honor your earthly father, or the memory of him, today?

-Kate Johnsen

**READ:** Luke 1:26-29

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## reflection

A couple of Christmas' ago, I went to a late-night Christmas service. Before the service I saw my friend Mike and his wife, so I went over to greet them. Mike said they went to dinner before coming to service. Now Mike is not a big beer or cocktail drinker, but tonight seemed different. Mike smelled like he had more than just a few cocktails with dinner. A small voice came over me and said, "Tell them that you are going to drive them home and we could get their car tomorrow morning." Mike was very upset that I even made that suggestion but after a few minutes, with the help of his wife, we convinced them to let us drive them. Thank you, God!

Whose voice did I hear? I believe that voice is your conscience, but the voice is also God's voice coming through you. The Lord is with you, the Lord is with you.

What would happen if every decision you made was the voice of God speaking to you in the back of your head?

How can we hear God's voice more clearly? Try reducing the noise in your lives!

-Scott Plantz

**READ:** Luke 1:31-33

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## reflection

How many times have you heard the phrase “they just don’t make things like they used to?” So many things in life are not made the way they used to be and are not meant to be permanent. We have temporary housing, paper plates and napkins, and with the devices we can’t live without, there is an idea known as “planned obsolescence.” This is where the device is no longer supported by the manufacturer with updates and technical support. Our society wants us to live in this mindset where everything is temporary.

But as we know, God’s kingdom operates with an upside-down mentality. While the world strives for temporary, God lives in the eternal. When Jesus’ birth was announced to Mary, the angel said, “and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.” In a world full of temporary, the promise of who Jesus is, is permanent. Jesus will reign forever. His kingdom will never end. Friends, this is not something too good to be true. This is a true promise of hope, peace, and security.

Jesus’ coming to Earth gave hope and ushered in a new era of an eternal kingdom. Jesus’ coming fills my heart with optimism and hope, and I hope and pray your heart is filled with the same hope and optimism today.

*-John Whirledge*

**READ:** Luke 1:38

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## reflection

God chose Mary to be the mother of his son and, incredibly, she accepted this call, which saved me! Would I have been so accepting? Would I have said, "I am the Lord's servant?" Even though I readily say that I want to serve the Lord, to proclaim myself as a servant isn't quite as easy. Identifying myself as a servant conjures up fears of oppression, inferiority, and loss of self-identity. Mary chose complete humility over fear.

If Mary was afraid, she must have quickly reminded herself of her faith for she said, "May your word in me be fulfilled." She trusted God's word and remembered the promise: "For no word of God will ever fail" (vs.37). When I think of giving myself totally to God's service, I immediately question if I will be capable of doing God's work. Mary chose complete dependence on his word. I wonder if Mary knew the consequences of the position she just accepted. She was about to face a life of joy, hardships and sadness, and a life that saved the world!

How does God want you to serve today to further his kingdom?

How will you respond?

-Kitty Kincaid

**READ:** Micah 5:2, Matthew 2:6

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## reflection

This is one of several examples of God describing the savior to come, Jesus Christ. In Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:6, God establishes that the Messiah will come from a small village in Judah named Bethlehem.

Why would God choose for the great Messiah, Savior of the World, to be born in the middle of nowhere? There could be multiple answers to this question (and I encourage you to explore them), but I believe it has to do with our God who loves to do the unexpected.

Our savior would have humble beginnings. Yes, he will be a ruler over Israel and shepherd its people. But first, he will be a small child in the world like everybody else. Maybe this is God saying, "The greatness of this Messiah doesn't come from his circumstances, but from his very nature." Maybe he is saying, "Sometimes big things come from small places." But I do know he is saying, "The Messiah is coming, but look carefully!"

*-Aliyah Bing*

**READ:** Matthew 13:54-55

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## reflection

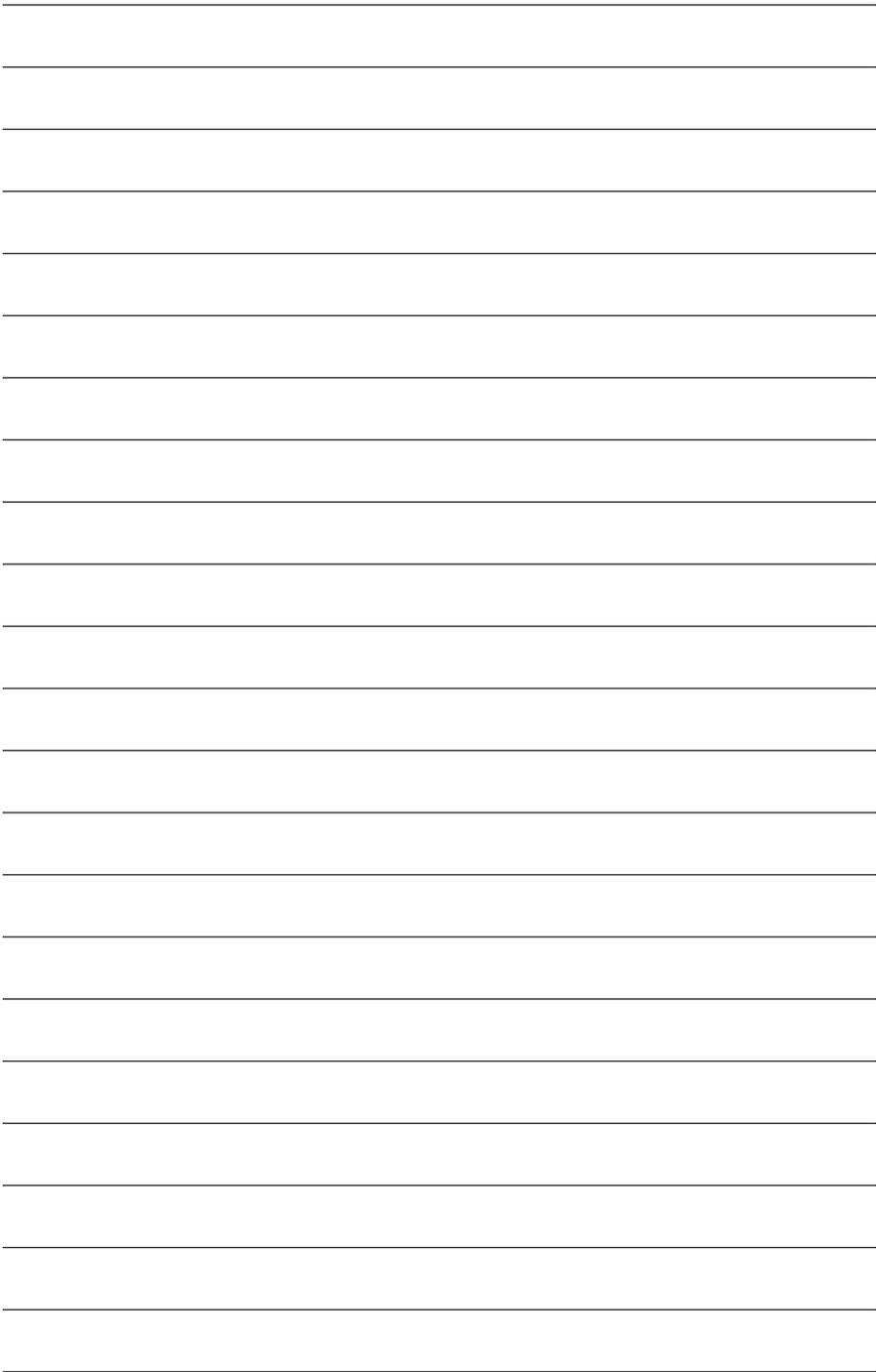
In order to understand this passage, it is important to look at the context in which it is presented.

Earlier in the Gospel of Matthew, 12:46-50 gives a hint at what is happening. While Jesus was preaching, his mother and brothers approached and asked to see him. When advised his mother and brothers were there to see him, Jesus responded by saying his disciples were his real mother and brothers. It must have been a shocking scene.

Hurt feelings? Yes, Jesus must have had them in spades. Haven't we all felt that way? His own family did not believe his message and many of us have had the same experience. It therefore comes as no surprise when we see the reaction Jesus had in Matthew 13:53-55. In fact, this might have been even worse. Those present "took offense" at him.

Did these events affect the ministry of Jesus? Absolutely not. He moved on from his home town and continued preaching. He was on a mission and we must be too. Just remember the words of Jesus in John 8:32, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

*-Rich Wallace*



**READ:** Matthew 1:18-21

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## reflection

Joseph. If ever there was an “unsung hero,” it’s Joseph. He and Mary had been pledged to one another with a legal and religious ceremony which preceded marriage. This commitment was so binding that any infidelity was considered adultery: a divorce was needed to end the relationship. Each was to be sexually pure until their wedding.

Joseph was heartbroken to learn of Mary’s pregnancy. How could Mary, his Mary, have betrayed him this way?

Joseph had difficult options. He could deny that the child she was carrying was his before everyone. Mary’s disgrace would be spread abroad and follow her all of her life.

The second was contemplating how to divorce her without anyone questioning them when God intervened.

In a dream, the angel of the Lord appeared and told him that the father of Mary’s baby was the Holy Spirit. Joseph was told to name him Jesus, the one who would save us all from sin. Brave Joseph believed the angel. He took Mary as his wife, Jesus as his son. His example is powerful!

*-Becky Lawrence*

**READ:** Matthew 1:18-19

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## reflection

Sometimes it's difficult for us to distinguish between divine intervention and everyday run-of-the-mill stuff. Joseph wrote Mary's pregnancy off as human imperfection when in reality, it was far more divine. It's often difficult for us to see God's divinity in ourselves. That's because too often we think that our humanness is bad. We often downplay our humanness because we believe that being human means only having sin when in reality, as his creation it means that we are beloved children of God.

It was hard for Joseph to fathom that God would place his divine power in a human with sins. Just like us, Joseph thought that human and sin were one in the same. We think that we're too far gone to be holy. But God still loves us. He loves us a lot. He loved us enough to put his divinity in our sin, to put his son Jesus in our mess to save us. God showed us that being human doesn't disqualify us because he sent Jesus, being fully human and yet fully God, to eternally forgive us of our sins. And it all began with Joseph accepting that God loves us enough to put his divine power in us.

*-Noah Steinecker*

**READ:** Matthew 1:20

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## reflection

He considered or, ἐνθυμέομαι (enthumeomai), meaning: he was in a passionate frame of mind, easily agitated or quickly moved by strong, provoking impulses. Joseph was disturbed. The angel of the Lord rightly called this considering fear. Contrast this way of operating with our other possibility seen in the word spirit, πνεῦμα (pneuma), meaning the vital principle by which the body is animated and the rational spirit – the power by which a human being feels, thinks, wills – decides. This is the spirit breathed into Adam, available in us and through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who comes to us when we are afraid and cannot think our way out of our problems.

One Christmas, I had a problem. There would be no money for gifts or decorations until just before Christmas. As a single mother, I wanted to make the season special for my daughter who was three. While I considered this...a catalog arrived advertising Disney collector ornaments, big as grapefruits and beautiful. The Spirit inspired me to create a contact paper tree on our wall. We cut out all the ornaments and taped them on our two dimensional tree - Perfect! How will the Spirit inspire you this season?

–Martha Brown

**READ:** Matthew 1:21

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## reflection

The birth of my first child was one of the scariest times of my life. Filled with excitement, I also was filled with doubts and questions. Will we have a boy or girl? Will the baby be healthy? Am I really ready to be a dad? Who do I turn to for reassurance?

Joseph had to have fear and doubt as he prepared to marry. After all, he was a devoted Jewish man and was faced with a dilemma. The woman he was about to marry was pregnant with a baby not conceived with him! He did not want his future bride to be embarrassed or violate his religious beliefs. Then God stepped in! He sent an angel to calm Joseph's fears.

He was told that the child would be named Jesus. All Joseph had to do was to accept the role God assigned him. So, Joseph embraced Jesus as his son to raise and remembered that God would provide the answer to his dilemma.

Like Joseph, I too can simply give my anxious thoughts to God and listen for the wisdom and strength to walk the path God places before me.

What direction do you need from God today?

*-Mark Kincaid*

**READ:** Matthew 1:22-23

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## reflection

This verse is easily one of the most looked-over verses that I know of. At a glance, Matthew is telling us that Jesus was born. But dive in, and you'll notice his birth was a miraculous one. The angel explained to Joseph that his child would change the world. He was to be named Jesus, or Immanuel, meaning "God is with us." Through every circumstance, through every battle, he will be there for us. Friends, I'll be honest I have to remind myself of this often. I'm a very independent (and stubborn 😊) person. Opening up and accepting help isn't exactly my forte. But I'm working on it, and I encourage you to do so as well. Take a moment each day to create a distraction-free area where you can converse with and ask God for help. For me, that tends to be in my car with all distractions turned off. Spend some time alone with God and you will be surprised how much you learn. You'll be surprised by the weight that can be lifted just by making time for him.

When and where works best for you to speak with God?

In what ways could you make that time more honorable to God?

-Keenan Melton

**READ:** Matthew 1:24-25

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## reflection

Christmas as any other day is not about what we want – it's about what God did for us and what he asks us to do, not for ourselves but for others. God asked Joseph to step up and help God give the world Jesus. Joseph likely faced criticism, but he did as the angel of the Lord told him; Joseph took Mary as his wife, named the baby Jesus and raised him as his own.

One Christmas I asked my family to spend Christmas Eve not opening gifts or going to parties. I asked them to serve Christmas Eve dinner to the homeless or hopeless people of Dayton. I asked them to give up our fun and comfort to show others Jesus through love while filling their need for food and companionship. My family was unsure of how to interact with them, or how they would react to us, but we went as God asked us, to be the gift of Jesus. **Some of us continued giving Jesus to the people every month for a couple of years.**

Is there something God is telling you to do that puts you out of your comfort zone or might cause people to think differently of you? Step up like Joseph and give people Jesus.

–Carolyn Pierce

**READ:** Luke 1:39-45

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## reflection

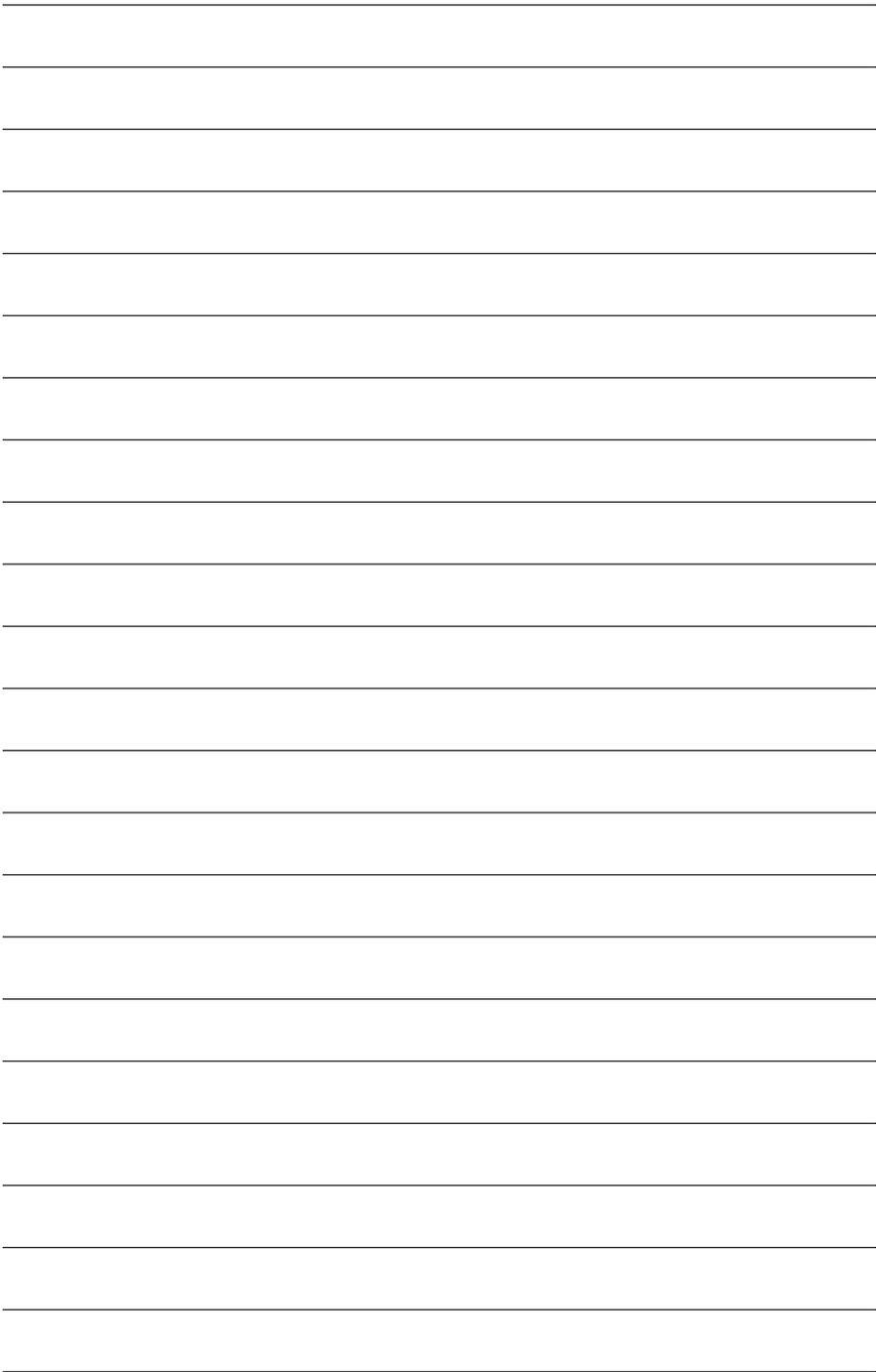
What is a promise you have heard from the Lord but haven't seen come to fruition yet?

Zechariah and Elizabeth were promised a child from God, and God delivered his promise in their old age. These two would have remembered the story of Abraham and Sarah and how they also waited until an older age to see the fulfillment of God's promise in their son Isaac.

Remembering is a spiritual discipline that we do not practice often. In the discipline of remembering, we look back and see how God has moved in the past and remember his faithfulness.

Sometimes we must look past our own lives to see God's faithfulness and it's in remembering that we have hope in God's promises today. Think about it, where has God been faithful to your family? Take this as an opportunity to ask your grandparents, parents, and mentor figures about a time in their lives when God was faithful. Then think about, how has God been faithful to you? Cling to both of those answers and whatever promise you are waiting for, you will soon be like Elizabeth and say, "Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

*-Jayden Groppi*



**READ:** Luke 1:46-47

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## reflection

Today we begin to read Mary's song, also known as The Magnificat, which means "my soul magnifies the Lord." Upon Elizabeth declaring that Mary is blessed above all women and that her child is blessed, Mary is so grateful and overjoyed that she can't help but to respond with praise and thanksgiving to God. She was humbled knowing that God would choose to bless her, a lowly servant girl, to mother the savior of the world! This is a great demonstration of both her faith and her humility. She is praising God even before seeing the manifestation of what Jesus will eventually do.

While the roles of parenting the savior of the world are already taken, there are still many other powerful ways in which God wants to use you to manifest his kingdom here on Earth as it is in heaven. If you don't know what your purpose is, I want to encourage you to seek God for direction. Then let's emulate the faith and humility of Mary and praise God in advance for using us in these mighty ways.

What talent, time, or resources has God gifted you with?

How can you utilize your gifts for the glory of God?

-*Marcy Walker*

**READ:** Luke 1:48-53

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## reflection

How much greater is it when we reach out to a group of people to help serve others? The blessing is multiplied abundantly!

I was a part of the yearly Thanksgiving/Christmas dinner at New Path and it gave me so much JOY. I thought for sure that others would have the same giving feeling, so I stretched my arms out to others that I work with to join me and many said YES. Not only were we able to serve the dinner each year, we went the extra step to provide Christmas cookies to take home in decorated little packages. I could never have done that alone.

Reach out to your community of friends or colleagues this holiday season and see what you can do together, performing mighty deeds with his arms for those whom you do not know.

*-Margie DeHays*

**READ:** Luke 1:56

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## reflection

Two women, of very different ages and stages of pregnancy, spent three months together. When I imagine what this might have been like, I see the older, more experienced Elizabeth teaching and comforting the younger, pregnant virgin Mary during this visit. It calls to mind how important the passing of knowledge from one generation to the next really is. As a father (and a son), it hurts my heart to see this chain as broken as it is today. Between households where kids don't have both parents pouring into them, to the technological distractions that pull ours and our kids' attention away, it seems like the world is set against these connections.

***My challenge this Advent season is this:***

Parents, make time for your children. Allow them space to ask you questions. Be assured, they are asking questions, and the world will give them answers as well. Children, set aside your distractions and be curious with your parents. They have a wealth of knowledge to share, they just need a willing audience. You may be surprised what you learn from each other, and how much closer you may become during this time.

-Jon Sears

**READ:** Luke 2:3-4

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## reflection

A virgin conceiving the Son of God? HUGE news. This is huge. Bigger than big. Never done before and never to be done again. Not just right now news, changing the rest of human existence news. Yet Joseph had to go on with his ordinary life. However, I do not believe it is the importance of the news that is equal to the mundane of everyday life. I believe that the equity lies in how effortless miracles can happen when you let God use you to do his work. A virgin getting pregnant? Impossible. Unless... unless you are doing God's work. Is God calling you to do something big? Is God calling you to do something small? No matter how simple or impossible it may seem, all you have to be willing to do is to serve the way he calls you to. Nothing is impossible. Miracles happen everyday. Some big, some small, but all seemed impossible without the hand of God in it.

When we can lean into our faith, his strength, his hope, his love, then we can hear his direction and his promises. God is not that flaky friend that is giving false hope with a too-good-to-be-true kind of job. His words might not come with detailed instructions. His direction for your faith journey is not likely to be easy. But His promises for your impact is HUGE news.

*-Lindsey Brookhart*

**READ:** Luke 2:1-5

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## reflection

When you think of Bethlehem, what comes to mind? For most, it's the Nativity scene – perfect weather on a clear starry night. Cute and cuddly animals, visitors from afar and a host of angels all surrounding a sparkly-eyed precious baby Jesus. For me, that scene is a little... sanitized. As the famous hymn *Away In A Manger* states of our newborn savior, “no crying he makes.” ...really? Anyone who's raised babies knows babies cry. Babies poop. Babies barf. Jesus was divine, but he was human. So often we forget about the human side of Jesus' birth—That Jesus was a soon-to-be refugee, conceived outside of traditional marriage and born into poverty.

I was reminded of the importance of context when visiting Bethlehem in 2018. There are Christians living in Bethlehem who are frustrated by the Christian tourism industry. “They come to see where Jesus ‘walked’ but they neglect the people with whom Jesus lives,” they told me, referencing the resurrected Christ today.

Are you ready to move beyond the sanitized, romanticized version of Jesus' birth?

Hear from Palestinian Christians and learn more about what Bethlehem is like today: [ginghamsburg.org/bethlehem](http://ginghamsburg.org/bethlehem).

–*Dan Bracken*

**READ:** Luke 2:6-7

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## reflection

Do you think Mary dreamed that her son would be born in a cave?

Usually when a woman becomes pregnant there's a lot of excitement and planning for the new arrival. I guess that would be the case in the first century as well. However, everything about Mary's pregnancy was out of the ordinary from start to finish. She was unmarried and pregnant. A pretty scandalous thing for that time period. For any regular girl, that would be a hard thing to accept when you live in a culture that only values married women that have children, and in particular boy children.

But here we find Mary in a cave giving birth for the first time, away from her home, with no family or friends to help her through the birth of her son. The Gospel of Luke doesn't give us any insight into how Mary is feeling. Was Joseph the only one with her during the birth or did he find a midwife in town? Wouldn't you expect if you were giving birth to the Son of God that there would be more fanfare than this? I've found in my life and as I've read stories in the Bible that God does very important things in obscurity to protect the purpose and plans that he has for those involved. So when you get that nudge in your spirit that the Creator is speaking, say "Yes, Lord here am I," and he will do the rest.

*-Jennifer Bing*

**READ:** Luke 2:8

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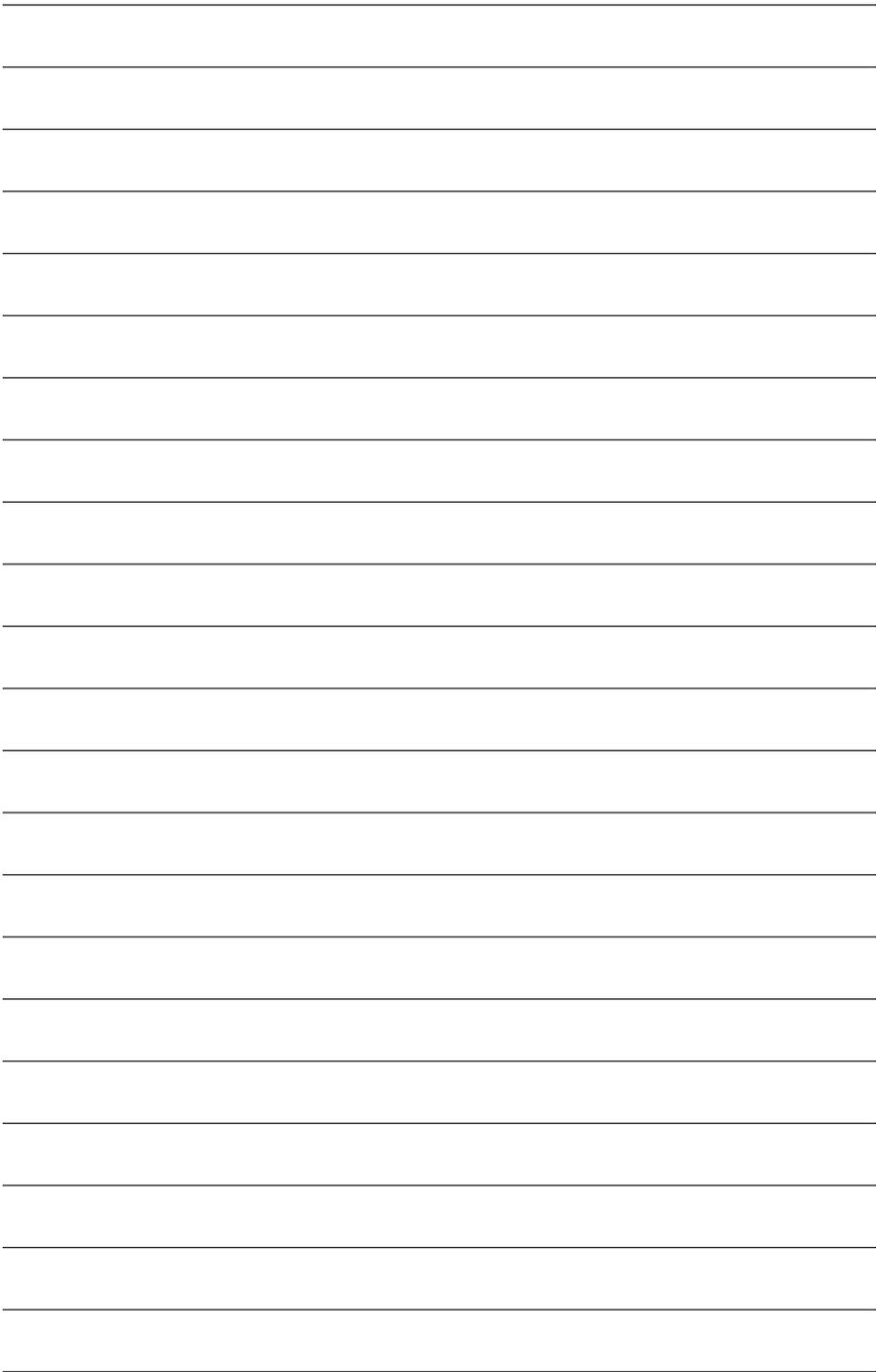
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## reflection

Have you ever worked third shift? You know, 11pm to 6am. My husband did it for years. He was always so tired. It was really hard on him physically and just missing out on life. I will never forget the Christmas where he had to work overnight from Christmas Eve to Christmas morning. I had to keep the kids busy until he came home. He was so tired; he just kept dozing off. It was his dedication to our family that kept him leaving the house night after night. These shepherds did the same sitting in that cold field night after night caring for their flock. I love our God and his use of the unexpected. God honored those weary shepherds with the unexpected.

Are you open to the unexpected from God?

*-Sarah Hardin*



**READ:** Luke 2:8-11

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## reflection

Some of the best scripture found in the Bible are in these few verses. "I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people."(vs 10) In biblical days, shepherds had a difficult job that earned no rank in society, yet they were chosen as they stood for the average Judean. The key here is that the angels were bringing the wonderful news to ALL PEOPLE. We live in a world filled with tragedy because many of our lives are filled with suffering, sorrow, and much conflict. If there was ever a time that we need to remember and need peace on earth, it is now.

If I were to think back to a time when I found what I considered true peace or when I am most at peace, it varies at different points in life. We are all different and what we consider peaceful varies for each of us, but I think we can agree that we seek it every day. Peace makes us feel happy and content. If you want peace today and in the coming year, you will have to pursue it. If you cannot find it you will have to make it, but the greatest peace you will ever enjoy comes from Jesus. Just as those shepherds in the field that night received news of great joy, all you need to do is receive Jesus to have immense joy and peace.

*-Deb Frazier*

**READ:** Luke 2:12-14

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## reflection

On a night more than 2000 years ago, shepherds near Bethlehem were watching over a flock of sheep. Suddenly a radiant, heavenly angel appeared before them. The shepherds became terrified. The angel, however, told them not to be frightened. He was bringing them wonderful news. The long-awaited Messiah had just been born in Bethlehem. They would find him in a manger wrapped in strips of cloth. Immediately, many other angels appeared praising God, singing, "Glory to God in highest heaven and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

Those words still ring true today. No matter what we face in life, we can find inner peace when we dedicate our life to God.

*-Judy Deeter*

**READ:** Luke 2:15-20

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## reflection

Isn't it interesting that shepherds were the first bearers of the good news of the birth of Jesus into the world. It is my understanding that shepherds were people who lived on the margins of society. They were living in the fields, rough and rugged men who had courage and tenacity. They had to guard sheep from predators, and they had to risk their lives for their flock at times.

The angels sought these men out and gave them the gift of being the first witnesses of a world transformation. It seems fitting that the shepherds, those on the margins, were the first to bear witness of God's grace.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus came to give the good news to the poor. Here the poor were the first to bring his good news to the world. They were the ones to announce that the one who came to give his life for his flock had come. The Good Shepherd had been born.

*-John Jung*

# Wednesday, December 21

**READ:** Luke 2:12, John 6:35

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## reflection

The angel appeared to the shepherds in the field and told them “You will find the babe...,” in Luke 2:12. The shepherds had to go look for the newborn Savior. They had to take action and go search for the promised Christ.

What are we searching for, looking for, this Christmas season? Fun times of celebrating with friends and family? I have such special memories of Christmas Day at my in-laws’ home. All of the family gathered and extended family dropped in throughout the day. Chris Jung, my mother-in-law, spent days/weeks ahead preparing food. Our desire for good food and good visits were definitely met. What else do we look for or need over the holidays? Do we hunger for acceptance and affirmation from those around us? We are reminded in John 6:35 that Jesus is the bread of life and he is the answer to all of our wants and needs, our deep desires and longings. His love can and will sustain us.

So, as we search for meaning and happiness in this season of celebration, remember that really we are seeking Christ, the Messiah who can and will fulfill just what we need and are searching for.

*-Deb Jung*

**READ:** Matthew 2:1-2

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**NEXT STEPS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## reflection

How far would you go to see a baby? When our first child was born many things were happening in our families' lives. My father-in-law worked a post-retirement job to keep busy, and he of course was scheduled to work the day our daughter was born and the next day. Unfortunately, his boss wouldn't let him change the schedule to meet his first grandchild. But my in-laws were not deterred. They traveled at night, guided by stars, to her birthplace. They sought help along their path to find their first granddaughter's resting place around 11pm that very day. After visiting for an hour, they returned home.

Until now, I've focused on being irritated with that boss. But they drove five hours round trip to see the newborn babe on the day of her birth to greet her and express their love! Wow! Their journey itself was a gift, just like the Magi's journey was a gift and their first act of worship. The Magi may have journeyed for two years to greet the Messiah and share their wonder-filled worship for this prophesied King of Kings.

How do you allow yourself to be deterred or distracted by the realities of daily living when you are called to worship the Messiah? How far will you go to bring your worship to the wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace this season and throughout the year?

-Melissa Leembruggen

**READ:** John 1:1-5

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## reflection

In the beginning...

When did you begin? I have asked myself this question a lot through the years. For so long, I thought my purpose was who my parents, my church community or my culture traditionally projected on me to be. Later on, God began to inspire this question inside of me. As I reflect on this scripture, I realize Christ came into the world already knowing the answer to that question. He knew why he had to live and later, why he had to die. His resurrection would be the freedom for us all.

I encourage you to meditate on this scripture: "The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone." That means you were there, too, in the beginning with God and his Word. He spoke you into existence! All that you are, all that you'll ever be, was there in the beginning with God. Your greatest dreams, God was dreaming for you and speaking them into you. He loved you then and he loves you still. Remember his light still shines in the darkness and nothing you encounter will ever extinguish his light. You are his light to the world.

*-Tiffany Taylor*

**READ:** Matthew 1:18-25

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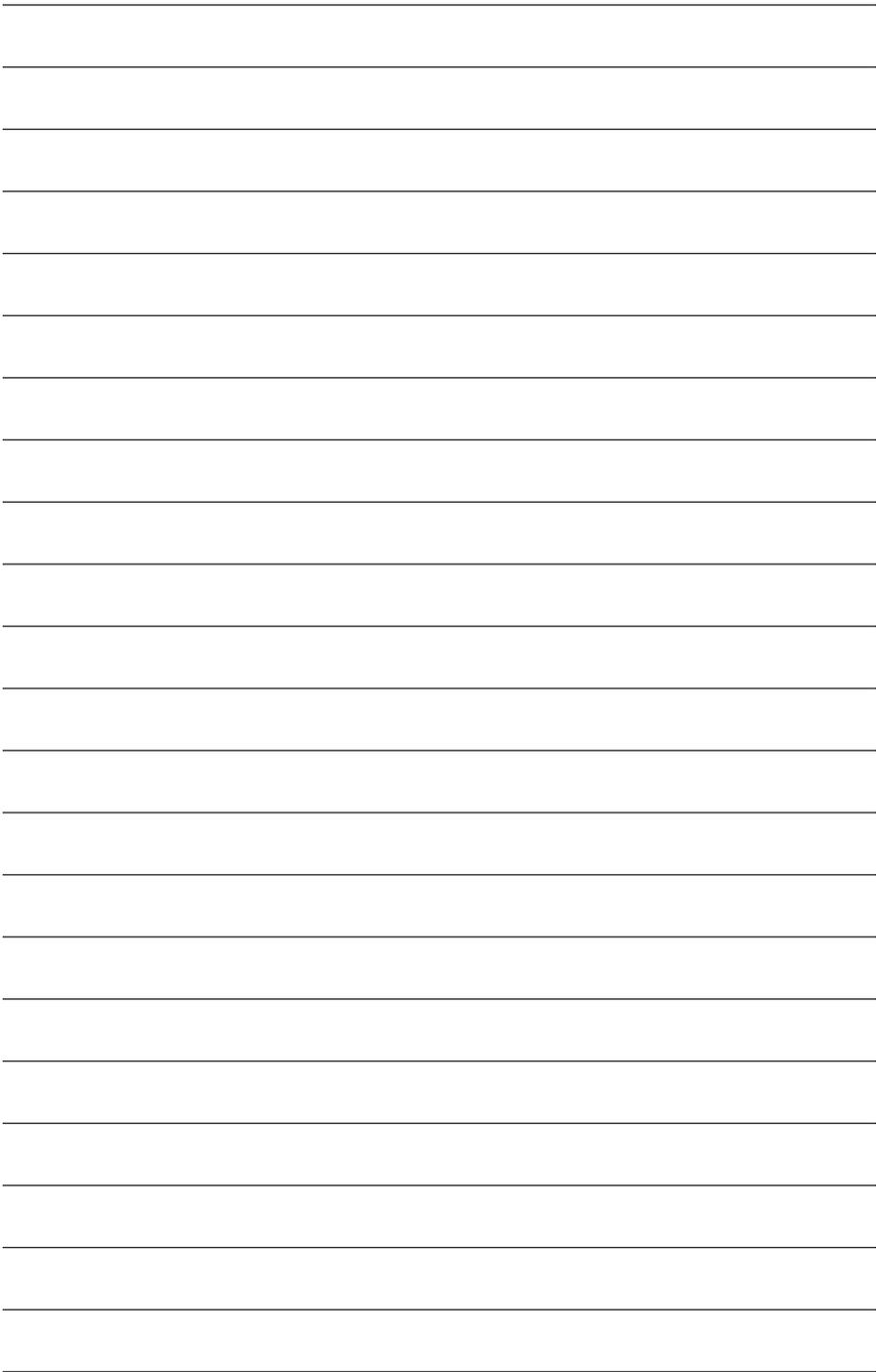
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## reflection

Jewish marriage involved three basic steps: an agreement between the families, a public announcement, then the marriage itself. Because Mary and Joseph were engaged, Mary's apparent unfaithfulness carried severe social stigma. According to Jewish civil law, Joseph had a right to divorce her, and this law included provisions for stoning her and her partner to death. Joseph was faced with a difficult choice after discovering that Mary was pregnant: divorce Mary quietly or have her stoned. But God provided a third option – marry her. Consenting to marry her surely cast doubt on his own innocence regarding the pregnancy, as well as a social stigma they would carry for the rest of their lives. Yet, Joseph chose to obey the angel's command.

The angel declared to Joseph that Mary's child had been conceived by the Holy Spirit and would be a son. This reveals an important truth about Jesus – he is both God and human. The infinite, unlimited God took on the limitations of humanity so he could live and die for the salvation of all who would believe in him. Joseph changed his plans quickly after learning that Mary had not been unfaithful to him. He obeyed God and proceeded with the marriage. Joseph went ahead with what he knew God wanted him to do. Sometimes we hesitate to do what God wants because of what others might think. We must choose to obey God, rather than seek the approval of others.

*-Karl Penn*



**Sunday, December 25**

**READ:** Luke 1:1-2:21

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**NEXT STEPS:** \_\_\_\_\_

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A collection of white, stylized snowflakes of various sizes and designs, scattered across the lower half of the page. Some are large and prominent, while others are small and delicate. They are set against a white background, creating a festive, wintry atmosphere.

***Merry Christmas***  
***Ginghamsburg Family!***

May the hope of Christ  
shine through you on this day.

