

**Telling The Story of The Gospel
Through 25 Devotionals**



A Publication of Bethany Church, Long Beach

Advent is a season of preparation.

Think of preparing your homes for the holidays. There is shopping, baking, cleaning, decorating, rearranging furniture to fit in the Christmas tree. All of this is the process of preparing the way for the holiday.

The heart behind this Advent Devotional, written by leaders and lay leaders at Bethany Church, is to help us all prepare the way for Christmas in our hearts. Even more important than the shopping, baking, and decorating, we hope to take time during this season to rearrange the priorities of our hearts as we read through God's plan of redemption in these scriptures. We also hope that the Advent Activities included here will help you to shine the light of Jesus this season by being a blessing to others.

Many thanks to the twenty-five people who shared their hearts with us in this devotional. We hope it is a blessing to you and your family.

Pastor Ben Overby & The Bethany Church Staff

December 1

Read Genesis 1-2

“The Light of the World”

By Jeff Williams, Bethany Member

A number of years ago, I took a class through NASA to become certified to check out moon rocks that were brought back to earth by the Apollo astronauts. Holding that dark gray dirt from the lunar surface yet seeing how bright the moon is when I stare up at it on a clear evening, got me thinking about God’s design for that celestial body.

When I looked at the creation story at the very beginning of the Old Testament, the first thing I saw on God’s “To Do” list was when He said, “Let there be light.” Then in skipping down a few verses, I read that God made two great lights, the greater one to govern the day (the sun) and the lesser one to govern the night (the moon). At this point, I felt like I ran into a snag. I knew from my science class back in high school that the sun generates light and is very bright (so don’t stare at it!), but the moon doesn’t generate any light at all.

So why does God call them both lights when only one generates actual light? It would seem like the moon gets credit for being a light because it makes a good reflector for the sun’s light. That’s because the lunar soil has a unique design, in that, even though it appears dark gray, it is highly reflective due to shiny flat particles that scatter light back toward the source.

When I got to the New Testament, I saw that Jesus refers to Himself as the “light of the world.” Then, I also saw that Jesus

calls his followers the “light of the world.” But wait, how can we be the light of the world when we don’t have the light that Christ has? What if we compare our relationship with Christ to the relationship the moon has with the sun? I can’t generate any light on my own, but perhaps I can reflect His light.

I think God puts an exclamation point on this idea, since it says in Exodus 34:29, “When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he had the two tablets in his hand, and he did not know that the skin of his face was ablaze with light because he had been speaking with God. ” Apparently, our whole being can reflect God’s light when we are in a personal relationship with Him, including our skin! We are designed to reflect the light of Christ, not just figuratively, but also quite literally.

Our calling, it seems, is to reflect the light of Jesus much like the moon reflects the sun’s light. Even when people can’t see the Son, they can still see us, and we can reflect Jesus to them.

Discussion Question: Where do you see people living in darkness and how can you reflect the light of Christ there?



Advent Activities

Advent Jar of Thanks

Supplies Needed:

- Jar or container
- Slips of paper
- Pens or colored pencils

Instructions:

At the end of each day of December, encourage each person to write or draw something they are grateful for that day. This would be a great thing to do at dinner time or before bed. Have everyone add his/her piece of paper to the jar each day. At the end of each week, choose 3-4 to read aloud.

Then, as both December and 2025 come to a close, make time on New Year's Eve to read all of the slips of paper aloud, giving thanks to God for all that He has done. That would also be a great time to send messages of thanks and love to people whose names appear in your Jar of Thanks!

Want Extra credit? Get a bigger jar and start this tradition in January for the entire year. This is a great way to look back on God's provision over the course of a calendar year.

December 2

Read Genesis 3

“Light Shines Brightest in the Darkness”

By Dana Davis, Bethany Elder

It's the time of year when leaves fall, shadows lengthen, and darkness takes over. And it is during this time of dark long days, that we begin our Advent season – looking forward to an answer to what is broken. Is the darkness the end, or the beginning?

In the garden, perfection was in the air – all was right between God and His new creation. He drew the line – “Not this tree.” If the simplicity wasn't enough, the consequences were dire.

The question really at the heart of it is, “Would I have taken that fruit?” I have had different answers over the years. Like Adam, and Eve, I don't want it to be my fault – I don't want to take responsibility for my defiance, but I have defied God – directly. So, yes. I would have.

Now what? It feels like the end, yet it is the beginning of one of the most beautiful redemption stories ever – a story that matters for all of us.

Right after humanity takes our first stumbling steps away from God, the world shifts – everything changes. Adam and Eve hide, and the garden shudders with loss; the world is broken.

Yet even here, in the middle of humanity's first failure, God does something remarkable: He comes looking for us. “*Where are you?*” He asks—not because He doesn't know, but because we have lost our way. The first feelings of fear and shame reveal

something true of every human heart: **we were made to be with God, but we can't fix the distance we created between us.**

Still, God doesn't walk away. With judgment and mercy, He makes a promise, He hands out justice, and He clothes Adam and Eve, covering their shame Himself, with a sacrifice. It's a small act with a large echo—the kind of grace that will later unfold in Jesus Christ, the One who covers us, not with garments but with forgiveness, healing, and new life. It's the earliest glimmer of the gospel, an emerging light on the horizon of a winter night.

Genesis 3 reminds us of what Advent makes clear: **we need a Savior because we cannot return to God on our own. But God has always planned to come to us Himself.**

He didn't give up on Adam and Eve, and He doesn't give up on us. The promise He spoke in the garden becomes the promise kept in Bethlehem. What began as a faint hope becomes joy in the manger, strength at the cross, and victory at the empty tomb.

As we wait in this Advent season, we remember that God's faithfulness began at the very moment we needed Him most. And it continues, even now, in every place we feel lost, ashamed, or far away.

This is the hope of Advent: God comes for us, He offers a way back, and He does not leave us alone.

Light shines brightest in the darkness – I love that we celebrate Jesus Christ's birth in the darkness of winter!

Discussion Question: What do we learn about God's plan to save his people through this passage?

December 3

Read Genesis 6:9-22; 8:13-9:17

“Another Promise”

By Andrea Hendrix, Bethany Staff

As the story begins, we see that God made man in His image, to be his representatives on earth, ruling and expanding. But they doubted God’s good plan for them and decided to choose their own way, trying to be like God as they ate the forbidden fruit. As a result, God cursed the serpent and promised one day a Savior would come who would crush the serpent once for all. But 1500 years and a promise did not bring change. By Genesis 6:11 the earth was corrupt and filled with violence, still in need of a Savior.

Enter the flannel graph story of Noah, the ark, pairs of all the animals, a lot of water, sacrifices, and a rainbow. God placed his favor on Noah and called him to build a boat in the middle of the desert. Noah obeyed, building the ark. Then the animals showed up, seemingly too many to fit in the boat. But they all fit and after weeks and weeks of rain and months of floating, they finally end up on dry land. As they exit the ark, God renews his covenant with Noah and Noah worships God through giving sacrifices.

In this story, it may sound like Noah was the one who saved the day. But Noah was not the Savior; in fact, even he eventually chose his own way, too. Still God was faithful. He doubled down with love toward his image-bearers and gave another promise never to destroy the earth again.

In this story, as in all of the Biblical stories we learned in Sunday School, it is God who saves. God designed the ark, and Noah built it even when others laughed. It is God who provides the way to life.

As we look toward Christmas, we remember Jesus who obeyed God and is himself the way, the truth, and the life. For all of us who have disobeyed and chosen our own way there is a Savior, his name is Jesus.

Discussion Question: How do we see God being faithful to his promises in this passage?

December 4

Read Genesis 11

“More Than Words”

By Amy Kelly, Bethany Member

It is hard to accomplish something when people don't speak the same language. On a recent trip to a Disneyland, my children and I were passing through the park when we saw cast members starting to clear the area in front of the castle. They told us the Disneyland Band and Mickey Mouse would be coming soon. Fortunately, I had stopped in the perfect spot for a front row view. I watched while workers used curbs and landmarks to tell groups of people where they could and could not stand. One side of the crowd contained non-English speakers. The cast member resorted to using hand gestures and body postures to ask them to stay where they were standing. Several didn't understand and walked away. On the other side there were people who spoke and understood English. Fortunately for the cast members trying to set up the crowd, it was this side that would need to part like the Red Sea at a designated point during the impromptu show so the parade could proceed down Main Street. In the middle of all that chaos, I couldn't help but think about how quickly things unravel when understanding slips away.

This incident reminded me of when God confused the languages at Babel. The people wanted to make a name for themselves.

After all, these were the mighty survivors of the flood and Noah's descendants. Their complicated self-glorifying plan to build a city that towers to the heavens started to become impossible. I could imagine how bricks started to fall apart and walls crumble because the workers couldn't understand each other. No longer able to easily communicate, they had no choice but to shut down their brick factory and construction company. As a result, the people spread out over the earth as they were originally commanded to do upon exiting from the Ark. Furthermore, God called out by name the ten generations from Noah's son Shem to Abraham. This genealogy set the stage for how God would use this specific lineage to ultimately save his people yet again.

The story at Babel reveals that human rebellion cannot interfere with God's plans. God is always in control. His plan is infinitely more complex than guiding people where to stand and when to move for a parade. He can build up and tear down. He brings people together and scatters them apart to serve his purpose. Ultimately, God continues to demonstrate that his plan is so much greater than words can describe.

Discussion Question: What do we learn about God's plan to save his people through this passage?

December 5

Read Genesis 12:1-9; Ch 15

“A Promise Shimmering with Hope ”

By Ruth Osborn, Bethany Member

God's plan to save His people started thousands of years ago with an imperfect, childless man past his prime, who God chose to become the father of a great nation. It culminated in Jesus leaving his heavenly home to enter a wilderness world and redeem his people. This timeless story reverberates through the ages to this very moment. And every believer has a part in God's still-unfolding plan. Our collaboration in this plan starts with faith. Through eyes of faith, the world shimmers with hope and promise.

God called Abram out of his wealthy city life and into the unknown. God said it to him plainly: “Go from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.”

So, Abram got going. He packed up his immediate family and left his comfy life in Ur, a bustling trade center that had running water, sewer systems, roads—to live in a tent in the wilderness.

When I put myself in Abram's shoes, I see my fists clenched, holding on to stubborn, preconceived notions. I don't want to move from my soft life. Into the unknown. Into discomfort. Away from well-worn—and safe—paths of routine. Away from familiar landmarks and boundaries.

But what I see in Abram is a faith greater than fear, a faith that produced real-world obedience and drew him away from earthly supports, letting him intimately know God as father, friend, promise keeper and protector.

I want this kind of kindled faith: where God himself becomes my home, my comfort, provision and peace. I want to open my hands and relax into God's calling, like, I imagine, Abram did.

It takes practice and discipline to walk by faith, not sight. By faith, we can be pilgrims who are not completely settled, ever. The call of God is a direction—not a destination—and by faith, we can move one step at a time into His will. Like Abram did.

In Genesis 15, God's promise to bless Abram and all nations through him was officially sealed in a covenant. Animals were cut in half and arranged opposite each other. Traditionally, the parties of a covenant would walk barefoot through the pooled blood, between the pieces, as a promise to forfeit their own lives if they broke the terms of the agreement.

However, in this agreement, God is the only person to pass between the pieces, signifying that He alone guarantees the covenant between Himself and Abram. In the same way, Jesus alone shed his blood for me and trillions of other believers.

In the fullness of time, we will all go to be with Him, and we won't need faith anymore because all will be revealed and known. But until then may we be receptive to the Holy Spirit, positioned with open hands, ready to be salt and light—even in quietness—so our holy choices can impact others for eternity.

Discussion Question: What do we learn about God's plan to save his people through this passage?

December 6

Read Genesis 17:1-8, 15-22; and Ch. 21:1-7

“The Child of a Promise”

By Paul Copeland, Bethany Elder

At first glance, this chapter might feel unrelated to the Christmas story. However, Christmas is the fulfillment of a promise that God made to Abraham right here in Genesis 17. Long before an angel told some shepherds in a field about the “good news of great joy that will be for all people” God made Abraham this promise, and John 1:4 tells us that Jesus’ birth was the moment that promise became flesh.

Abraham loved God, and God loved Abraham very much. One day, when Abraham was very old, God spoke to him, “Abraham, I am going to make you the father of many nations!”

Abraham had doubts. “But, Lord, how can that be? My wife Sarah and I are very old, and it would be impossible for us to have a child.”

God smiled. “Even though you are old, you and Sarah will have a baby boy, and through that boy, I will bless the whole world.” Abraham laughed and wondered. “Can it really be true?”

But God never breaks His promises. God promised life where there was none and Sarah had a baby boy! They named him Isaac, which means “*laughter*.” God had promised them a child and when their son Isaac was born, he was a living sign that God keeps His promises, even when it seems impossible.

Isaac's miraculous birth points forward to another miraculous birth, Jesus Christ, the ultimate Son through whom the promised blessings come to all people. Both births demonstrate that salvation is a miracle of God's grace, not human achievement.

We need a Savior who comes by God's power, not human effort. Just like Isaac's birth was a miracle, Jesus' birth was an even greater miracle. He came to bring God's love and forgiveness to the whole world. When Jesus was born, the angels sang, "Good news of great joy for all people! Today a Savior has been born!" God's promise to Abraham came true in Jesus. Through Him, everyone from every nation can belong to God's family.

Later in Genesis 22, God used Abraham's only son, Isaac as a symbol of how God would fulfill His promise through Jesus, the true sacrifice for sin. This promise began with God's initiative, not Abraham's effort. His faith was real, but his life was not perfect. In Genesis 17 God called Abraham to be blameless "Live in my presence and be blameless". That command sets the bar for perfect obedience, and even Abraham, the "father of faith," could not be truly blameless on his own. He had doubted, acted out of fear, and sinned.

God's standard is a holy life without sin. But just like Abraham, we all continually fall short. We cannot live blamelessly before God without His help. Genesis 22 shows that God's plan to save His people is initiated by grace, fulfilled through a promise, centered on faith, extended to all nations, and fulfilled eternally in Jesus Christ. Genesis 22 teaches that human effort is not enough. We need a Savior who can transform hearts, fulfill God's promise, and bring eternal life. That Savior is Jesus Christ.

So, when we celebrate Christmas, we remember that the baby in the manger was the child of a promise, a promise that God had made to Abraham. And just like Abraham, we can trust God's promises, because He always keeps them.

Discussion Question: What do we learn about God's plan to save his people through this passage?



Advent Activities

Gifting Care

Supplies Needed:

- Toy or \$25 Gift Card
- Cardstock or Construction Paper
- Crayons or Colored Pencils/Markers
- Ribbon

Instructions for families:

Allow children to accompany you to the store to pick out a gift he/she would enjoy giving to another boy or girl of the same age.

Then create a Christmas card for the child/young person who will receive the gift. Draw a Christmas picture and write a brief note wishing them a Merry Christmas. Don't wrap the gift, but you can use a ribbon to tie on the toy and through a hole punched in the corner of the card.

Adults can purchase toys for children 0-14 year old or purchase \$25 gift cards appropriate for teens/young adults ages 15-21.

Bring gifts to the Bethany Worship Services through December 7 or to the church office no later than Thursday, December 10 at 9AM.

December 7

Read Genesis 22

“The Perfect Sacrifice”

By Tim Springer, Bethany Pastor

Have you ever had to wait a long time for something? For the fulfillment of a dream or the realization of a goal you set out to accomplish? Maybe it was something you thought God told you He would do, but He hasn't yet brought it to completion?

Twenty-five years before the birth of Abraham's son, Isaac, God had promised Abraham that all the peoples on earth would be blessed through him. Abraham was 75 years old at the time, and he and his wife, Sarah, were childless. By the time Abraham was 85, God had promised him that he would have a son and that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. As the years went by and he and his wife were still childless, it must have been hard at times for Abraham to hold onto God's promises. Imagine Abraham's joy when, at the age of 100 years old, God gave him the son that He had promised him.

Abraham loved his son. As Isaac grew up, Abraham would have spent time with his son, playing with him, teaching him, training him to be a farmer and a shepherd. Abraham also would have taught Isaac about his faith in God and how God had been faithful to Him.

Now imagine how hard it must have been for Abraham when God tested him and asked him to offer his son, Isaac, as a burnt offering to God. This would have been an incredibly difficult task. This was the child that God had promised him. This was the

child he had been waiting for. This was the son through whom all the peoples on earth were to be blessed.

And yet, how did Abraham respond? Early the next morning, he obeyed God and set out on the journey to sacrifice his son. When Isaac asks Abraham where the lamb is for the burnt offering, Abraham replies, "God Himself will provide the lamb..." We don't see Abraham arguing with God or trying to strike a deal to save his son. Instead, we see incredible faith. Abraham obeys God to the point of holding the knife to slaughter his son, when God stops him and provides the lamb for the sacrifice. What an amazing display of faith by Abraham. And because of Abraham's faith, God reiterates His promises to make Abraham's descendants as numerous as the stars and to bless all the nations of the earth through him.

Fast forward 2,000 years. In the ultimate fulfillment of His promises to Abraham, God once again provides the Lamb, this time for the perfect sacrifice. He sends His only Son, Jesus, to earth to be born as a baby. Jesus will grow up and sacrifice His own life to become the Savior of the world, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through Him. What an amazing God of faithfulness to all of His promises!

Discussion Question: How do we see God being faithful to his promises in this passage?

December 8

Read Genesis 28:10-22; 35:1-15

“Stairway From Heaven”

By Allen Weingartner, Bethany Deacon

Immanuel, “God with us.” God has wanted to dwell in the midst of his people since the Garden of Eden, but our sin has separated us from Him. Since then, God has set about restoring our fellowship with Him. What happens at Advent is a step towards realizing that goal. Truly, in the manger, in an unassuming, innocent and vulnerable form, God is with us. Jesus, as God dwelling with us, is foreshadowed in Jacob’s strange dream in Genesis 28:10-22. Jacob, on the run from Esau, dreams of a stairway reaching the sky, and God’s angels going up and down on it. God gives Jacob a glimpse of heaven to symbolize God’s desire for mankind to be with God in heaven. The Lord affirms the continuation of his plan and reiterates with Jacob the covenant He made with Abraham that He will give him the land, and Jacob’s offspring “will be like the dust of the earth,” and that “all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.”

We know already that Jesus is the offspring through whom all of these descendants will come, and we know they are those who have become children of God by faith. Advent begins the fulfillment of this promise.

But how does this stairway fit into the Christmas story? Jesus answers this question when he says in John 1:51, “Truly I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” We could read

this as our way into heaven, but there must be more because nothing in Jesus' words or Genesis 28 indicates that it is a stairway for Jacob or us to take.

Instead, what Jacob's vision reveals is that Jesus is the connection between Earth and heaven. In God's desire to fellowship with us, he needed a way to overcome our sin, and in Jesus, we see the "place" where heaven touches Earth and our ability to "touch" heaven, where God is, comes through Jesus. Jesus is the stairway, or bridge between heaven and earth.

As we put all the pieces together and focus on God being with us, we can see it from Jacob to Jesus. It is not a coincidence that Jacob names the place where he has his vision Bethel, which means "House of God." It's a place where God dwells, where you can experience and interact with him. Later, God calls them to build the temple in Jerusalem, which was seen by Israel as God's dwelling place on Earth. Later, Jesus connects the dots when he refers to himself as the new temple in John 2. It is there that we realize that Jesus is the true temple, the stairway, the bridge, God with us, dwelling among us on earth.

What does this mean at Christmas? It means that heaven has come down to us in the form of the Son of God. He, Himself, opens the possibility of direct fellowship with God. In April, we will celebrate what He did for us on The Cross, but now we focus on the miracle of His presence. Coming to us as a vulnerable baby in a manger, God has broken through, heaven has pierced the divide, and God is with us.

Discussion Question: Where have you seen /experienced God's presence in your life?

December 9

Read Genesis 37, 50

“The Plot Twist”

By Laurie O'Toole, Bethany Staff

I've started watching a TV show that I thought was just a remake of an old TV lawyer show. But as I got to the end of the first episode, there was a plot twist so surprising that I gasped aloud! I never saw it coming! It was such a shocker that at the end of the episode, the actress who plays the lead comes on in a PSA to ask viewers not to share the ending with friends and family. However, once I did know the ending, I watched again to look for hints at who the characters really were and what they were really doing.

This story of Joseph is similar. Once you get to the end, you want to read it again to see what God was up to all along.

First of all, the characters are all messed up! Joseph probably shouldn't have taunted his older brothers, but also, his dad shouldn't have played favorites among them. Joseph's jealous brothers throw him in a pit, sell him to traders, and then lie to their father about his “death.” Then there are the awful people that Joseph meets in Egypt, who buy him into slavery, some who promise to help him but don't, plus the nasty wife that lies and accuses him of attacking her. None of these people are the heroes of this story, not even Joseph.

God is the hero of the story and He is the one working behind the scenes. Through every dramatic turn of this story, God puts Joseph right where He needed him to be to carry out the plan to save not only Joseph's immediate family, but also to save the

nations of Egypt and Israel. God's plan from the very beginning was to redeem His people and reconcile the broken relationships in Joseph's family.

This is what God has been doing throughout history. From the beginning of time, God has had been working out a plan for the good of His people.

This is the entire plotline of the Bible. That human beings are broken and stuck in our sin. But God made a way for us to be saved from that brokenness and to be restored to relationship with Him. The only way that is possible is through His son Jesus, whom He sent to be born as a baby in Bethlehem and to grow up to pave the way for our freedom from sin and death, which can only come through Jesus's own death on the cross and His resurrection 3 days later. His life, death, and resurrection make it possible for us to be forgiven and given new life, both here on earth and for eternity with Him in heaven.

That is the biggest & best plot twist in history!

Discussion Question: How have you seen God's "plot twist" in your own life?

December 10

Read Exodus 12:1-42

“A Spotless Lamb”

By Noah McMillen, Bethany Member

If I were an Israelite the day of the first Passover, I might have concluded that everything is hopeless. I'm sitting in slavery under the Egyptians, and Pharaoh's tyrannical rule just seems to keep getting worse and worse. Moses is here and seems to be sending plagues, but no matter if he turns the waters to blood or sends locusts or darkness, nothing seems to be changing – there is no way Pharaoh is going to let us go. I might have just wanted Moses to leave us alone and hope that things don't get any worse.

However, we have the luxury of knowing the story, knowing that God saves the Israelites in the end. But he doesn't do so without first asking for a sacrifice.

Each Israelite household had to slaughter a sheep or goat and spread the blood over the doorposts of their house to save them from the death of their firstborn child. Why did God make the Israelites do this? He could have just sent the plague only to the Egyptians, without requiring anything from the Israelites. After all, that's what he did with some of the other plagues like the insects or boils. But again, we have the luxury of hindsight and knowing that this unblemished lamb prefigures Jesus coming to save us. Paul calls Jesus our “Passover lamb” (1 Corinthians 5:7), and Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:18-20, “For you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of an unblemished and

spotless lamb. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was revealed in these last times for you.”

However, the Israelites at this time didn’t know that, they simply had to trust in faith and obey. Trust in God’s word that this blood of the unblemished lamb would save them. Trust that God would deliver them from the Egyptians. And those who trusted in God were saved. God saves His people from their enemies. Knowing this story, how much more should we, who are facing enemies bigger than the Egyptians – sin and death – trust in God and His unblemished lamb.

Exodus 12:14 says “this day [Passover] is to be a memorial for you,” and verses 24-27 command the Israelites to teach their children the meaning of this ceremony. As I read these verses through the lens of Christmas, I can’t help but feel they directly apply to us today as we celebrate and remember God sending His son Jesus to save all who would believe in Him.

Discussion Question: What do we learn about God’s plan to save his people through this passage?

December 11

Read Deuteronomy 5-6 **“His Gracious Gifts to Us”** **By Kevin Recker, Bethany Elder**

These two chapters of Deuteronomy were a reminder to God's people of the Ten Commandments that He had previously given to them. They are also an admonition to His people to always remember all that God had done for them. The natural outcome of this remembrance is to worship and obey Him alone.

I would like to focus our attention on the promises that are contained in these chapters and God's faithfulness to fulfill His promises. In Deuteronomy 5:6, God reminds Israel that He is the one who brought them out of the land of Egypt and delivered them from years of slavery. Way back in Genesis 15:13-14, God said this to Abraham: “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nations whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.” Exodus 12:36 describes the Exodus of Israel from Egypt and says “and the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus, they plundered the Egyptians”. This prophecy given to Abraham about the enslavement of Israel to Egypt and their subsequent deliverance and exodus was given more than 200 years before these events occurred. God did not forget His promise to Abraham. He was faithful to fulfill them hundreds of years later.

In Deuteronomy 5:15, God reminds His people that it was He, by His might, who delivered them from their slavery in accordance with His promise to Abraham. They were not set free by their own work or determination. As God used Moses, His servant, to deliver his people from their slavery in Egypt, so He used His son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver us from our slavery to sin (Hebrews 3:1-6). We are not made free by our own effort or merit but by the work of our Savior Jesus Christ. Romans 6:17-18 teach us that we all were slaves to sin, but God delivered us, giving us hearts to obey Him, and become slaves of righteousness. He is the one who inclines our hearts to obedience. We are not able to obey His commands in our own strength.

And in Deuteronomy 6:10, God reminds His people that in accordance with the promises that He made to their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that He would give to them cities which they did not build, houses which they did not fill, cisterns they did not build, and vineyards and olive trees which they did not plant. Likewise, God has given all of His good gifts to us through the promise of His son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We have not earned them, they are His gracious gifts to us. During this Advent season, let's praise God for His promises and His faithfulness throughout all generations to fulfill those promises.

Discussion Question: How do we see God being faithful to his promises in this passage?

December 12

Read Joshua 3-4

"A Stack of Stones"

By Stephanie Willis, Bethany Member

After 40 years of wandering through the wilderness of Sinai, Joshua is finally leading the Israelites into the Promised Land. Israel will now see the culmination of the promise that God made to Abraham generations before. The people cross the Jordan River as God miraculously causes the waters to pile up so they can cross over on dry land. Does this story sound familiar? Crossing the Jordan hearkens back to Israel crossing the Red Sea in flight from Pharaoh as they were delivered out of Egypt.

God's tangible presence is with the Israelites here just as it was by the Red Sea. Joshua instructs the priests to carry the Ark of the Covenant into the river, and as soon as they step into the water, God causes the waters to pile up. In Egypt, God's presence was seen in the pillars of cloud and fire that showed the people where to go. In the book of Joshua, the people follow the Ark, which was the physical representation of God's presence. Just like the Israelites, we have the tangible presence of God with us at all times. Today we have the gift of the Holy Spirit indwelling us, leading and guiding us along our journey of faith.

After the Israelites cross into the Promised Land, God asks twelve men, one from each tribe of Israel, to gather a stone from the river and build a monument to commemorate how God had delivered them. Joshua tells the people these stones are to help them remember the faithfulness of God. The stones also act as a conversation starter for future generations, so the testimonies of

God's faithfulness will be passed down to others. Remembering God's faithfulness to fulfill His promises is good for our souls. When we look back at what God has done, we remind our hearts of His unchanging character, growing our faith for today, and our hope for the future.

In my life, I have prayed and waited for God to deliver and answer certain prayers for years, sometimes feeling like I was wandering hopelessly in a wilderness, just like Israel. But I've witnessed God come through and do miraculous things in my life, which is a testimony I can use to strengthen my own faith, and to encourage others.

This Advent, as we reflect on the story of Jesus coming to earth to bring salvation for all, let us remember that God is faithful. He is a Promise-Keeper, who delivered His people in the past, and He will continue to deliver His children today. Take a moment to remember the ways that God has fulfilled His promises in your own life, and think of someone you can tell. Your testimony of God's faithfulness may be just the encouragement someone needs to persevere in their wilderness or to find true deliverance in our Savior for the first time, bringing them hope for eternity.

Discussion Question: How have you seen God be faithful to keep His promises in your life?

December 13

Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13

“An Unlikely King ”

By Tyler Gilley, Bethany Member

Saul, the king the people demanded, had failed. His disobedience revealed a truth we still wrestle with today: human strength and outward appearances cannot secure God's purposes. So, God sends Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint a new king—David, the youngest son of Jesse, a shepherd boy overlooked by everyone except God.

Notice how God works:

God chooses differently than we do.

Samuel assumes the tallest, strongest son must be God's choice. But the Lord says, *“Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”*

God's kingdom advances not through human power but through hearts surrendered to Him. Why does this matter? Because we can sometimes overlook others (or maybe ourselves!) based on age, career, knowledge of the Bible, and so on. But God doesn't just work through people who appear qualified on the outside. He sometimes uses the person we least expect to have powerful impacts for His kingdom.

Have you felt overlooked by others in your life (at church/work/school/home)? How could you take a step toward trusting in God's wisdom rather than in appearances or human strength?

God provides His chosen king.

David is anointed, and the Spirit of the Lord rushes upon him. This Spirit-empowered king will shepherd God's people and point forward to the ultimate King, Jesus Christ.

Why does this matter? Because David's anointing sets the trajectory for the Messiah. Centuries later, in the same town of Bethlehem, another unlikely King will be born. Like David, Jesus comes in humility, not grandeur. He is the true Shepherd-King who rescues His people, not from Rome, but from sin and death.

Through this passage, we learn that God's plan to save His people is rooted in His wisdom, not ours. He raises up a king after His own heart, and ultimately, that King is Jesus. Advent reminds us that God's promises never fail. When life feels uncertain, we can trust that His plan is unfolding, even when it looks different than we expect.

Discussion Question: How does David's anointing deepen your hope in Jesus as the true King this Advent season? What do we learn about God's plan to save His people through this passage?

December 14

Read 2 Samuel 7

“An Eternal Kingdom”

By Cam Warfield, Bethany Pastor

David had finally found a moment of tranquility in his life. After years of battles and relentless journeys, he had settled comfortably in his magnificent palace. As he surveyed all that God had accomplished in his life, he was filled with awe and gratitude. “Here I am, living in a cozy house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent,” he reflected. Deep within, David felt a strong desire to do something monumental for the Lord — to build Him a house that would reflect His glory and greatness.

However, through the gentle guidance of the prophet Nathan, God transformed David’s heartfelt wish into something even more extraordinary. “Would you build me a house to dwell in? ... The Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house.” God didn’t require David to build a house for Him. Instead, He promised to create something incredible for David — a kingdom destined to last forever.

This moment beautifully illustrates a profound truth about God’s redemptive plan for His people. Salvation is not about what we can achieve or construct for God. From the very beginning, redemption has been driven by God’s love and initiative. Just as He lifted David from the fields and placed him on the throne, God seeks to elevate us from our spiritual struggles and bring us into His embrace. The covenant with David reveals God’s unwavering intention to provide a King — one from David’s lineage — who would reign with unmatched justice and compassion.

That King is Jesus.

This story also highlights our deep-rooted need for a Savior. While David was indeed a remarkable king, he could not secure an everlasting kingdom. His victories were transient, and like all of us, he grappled with the reality of sin. Human efforts alone cannot construct a lasting kingdom. We yearn for a King who will never falter, whose throne stands firm, and whose reign brings authentic peace. Only Jesus, the Son of David and the Son of God, can fulfill that need.

In Jesus, we witness God's unwavering faithfulness. Although centuries passed after this promise was made, and there were times it seemed forgotten, the moment the angel spoke to Mary about her child reigning on David's throne forever, it became abundantly clear — God had kept His promise. Every word He speaks is fulfilled.

Advent is such a wonderful season to revel in that joyous truth. God's plan of salvation remains steadfast. His promises are dependable and true. The eternal King has arrived, and His kingdom is already here among us. And soon, that kingdom will be fully realized.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

Discussion Question: What do we learn about God's plan to save his people through this passage?



Advent Activities

Gingerbread Nativity Scene

Supplies Needed:

- Gingerbread House Kit
- Icing & Decorations
- Additional animal shaped crackers/cookies
- A creative Mind
- Details from Luke 2

Instructions:

First, purchase a gingerbread house kit that is ready to go; these are available at most grocery and department stores. You can also pick up some fun animal cookies/crackers to add to your scene.

Read Luke 2 before you begin. Then instead of building the gingerbread house according to the instructions, adapt it to become a Nativity Scene. Add as many biblical details as you can and decorate it accordingly.

Have fun as you recreate the story of the birth of Jesus!

Want Extra credit? Snap a picture of your family along with your Gingerbread Nativity and email it to info@bethanylb.org. We would love to see your creativity!

December 15

Read 1 Kings 8

“Solomon Dedicates the Temple”

By Sam Proctor, Bethany Member

How can we see around a corner? How can we see what's under a boulder? How can we see what will happen tomorrow, or a year from now? Hindsight may be 20/20, but true foresight is blind to us. We don't know what is around the corner or under the rock, and we don't know what will happen tomorrow until we get there. But what we DO know is that God promises to care for us. But that care may not look like what we want or expect, and it may take more time than we would like.

Solomon's building and dedication of the temple is a monument and milestone of God's generational promises, and proof that His promises take time. His time, not our time. The Lord our God makes promises to us throughout the Bible, for our benefit and His ultimate glory. And while there is so much we can unpack in 1 Kings 8, perhaps the biggest thing we can take away from this passage is the generational fulfillment of God's promises to His people, and the challenging requirement that we are patient to receive them.

This is shown in King David's desire to build a great temple to the Lord. 500 years before Solomon built the temple, God promised that His dwelling place would be built. But as appropriate as anyone might think it would have been for David to fulfill that promise; it was not David's temple to build (v. 17-20). Sometimes we might think something is ours to build or experience, but God has His plans, and His plans are not our plans. However, His plans are always to our benefit and His glory. Even when it takes

generations to fulfill and we don't see it, God will always fulfill His promises. Not to say that all God's promises take 500 years, but only to say that His promises are fulfilled outside of our own expectations.

Solomon demonstrates his understanding of God's timing, God's ultimate authority and glory, in his prayer dedicating the temple. As Solomon dedicates the temple, he persistently instructs us to turn our prayers, our eyes, our bodies, in the direction of the temple (v. 28-30). The temple is where the Lord dwells and the cloud enveloping the temple, (v. 10) yet another fulfillment of promise, is the shekinah glory shown to us. Solomon points us to God's glory. God is telling us through Solomon where to keep our focus through our patience. Through both our times of joy and our times of lament. Solomon acknowledges that there will be both when we wait on the Lord.

We all have had times where we think God should have provided for us and we didn't see that provision, and maybe you are experiencing that right now. God demonstrates to us in this passage and throughout His Holy Word, that even when we don't see Him working, when we feel that we are behind a corner or under a rock, He will never leave us or forsake us. God will always fulfill His promises.

Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem, is the culminating fulfillment of God's promise to dwell among us and care for us. Just as he allowed Solomon to build His temple to dwell among us, God sent Christ to earth to fulfill that same promise. This season we look to Jesus to remind us that God continually fulfills his promises in His own perfect timing. We can have peace when we rest in His care and His fulfillment of promises, knowing that we do not have to worry about tomorrow.

Discussion Question: How do you see God being faithful in His promises in this passage as well as in your own life?

December 16

Read 1 Kings 18

“Faith In The Big & The Small Things”

By Zach & Aubrey Tilson, Bethany Members

When I read this chapter, I am struck by the contrasting ways God reveals himself. In one of the most dramatic displays of God’s power, all of Israel is reminded of the might of their one true God and instantly turn away from their sin of pursuing other gods and idols. God’s power and presence in this scene is undeniable to all who witness it. Faith is easy when it’s so in-your-face.

And yet, when I consider the rest of the chapter and surrounding chapters, I am struck by the quietness in which God also shows himself and how quickly faith can falter in even the most devoted.

Obadiah, who boldly risked his life by hiding prophets being hunted by queen Jezebel (I’m reminded of Harriet Tubman or Corrie ten Boom), suddenly doubts God’s presence and power to protect him from King Ahab when he meets Elijah. Elijah, after boldly calling down fire from the Lord in front of thousands of onlookers, asks servants seven times to watch for his prayer of rain which finally comes in the form of a seemingly insignificant rain cloud on the horizon. In the end of the chapter, God empowers Elijah with an ability to outrun the king’s personal chariot and beat him to Jezreel, like some modern-day Marvel Character.

And yet, after personally experiencing God’s power so many times, Elijah becomes afraid, runs away from his troubles and

considers his own life worthless in the very next chapter until God, again, reveals himself in “a quiet whisper.”

I must ask myself, “Does my faith waiver like this, too?” Do I only look for the big and showy God moments? Do I notice the small ways in which he shows himself in my life? Do I doubt his protection and guidance even when I’ve seen him work directly in my life?

What big moments are we waiting for in our jobs, our marriages, our families, our circumstances, our friends and neighbors who need to experience the one true God? Are we too busy waiting for the big moments to notice all the little things He does for us and empowers us to do? Is our faith dependent only on God’s big moments in our lives?

Time and time again in scripture, we see God use unlikely people in big moments as well as small and quiet ones. Am I seeing them? Do I really trust in God’s faithfulness to me, even after all that I’ve seen Him do?

He is always faithful to us. Lord, help me see you and trust you in the small moments.

Discussion Question: What are some of the ways you’ve seen God be faithful in both the big and the small things in your life?

December 17

Read Isaiah 9:1-7; and Ch. 11:1-10

“Consistency is Key”

By Rich Craig, Bethany Elder

What is it that causes you to place your trust in someone? Is it their smooth talk? The swaying argument? Flattery? Promises of rich rewards? For me, I look for their consistency. A critical measure is, do they deliver on the promises they make?

Throughout the Bible, God's promises are laid out to those that seek His truth. In chapter 9 of Isaiah, it starts by reminding us of Zebulun and Naphtali. How God allowed them to fall to Assyria and be humbled. But then from the same region, the area of Galilee, we are told that Messiah will come and bring honor to them.

Isaiah goes on to tell us more about the Messiah. In addition to where he will emerge from, we also find out that He will free us from oppression, that the yoke will be broken, and that the oppressor will be overthrown. We aren't told the date. We aren't told about the battle plan.

But he does go on to tell us how the Messiah will arrive. He will come as a child. Born into the world as we were. He will be a son. When He comes into His kingdom, He will govern ALL, “the government will be on his shoulders.” He will be called Wonderful Counselor, meaning He is supernatural, above ALL. Mighty God, meaning He shall overcome ALL evil. Everlasting Father, that will provide ALL throughout eternity. Prince of Peace, He will bring eternal, everlasting, never-ending peace in the fullest sense.

this passage?

Then in Isaiah Chapter 11 we are given further evidence of God's steadfast consistent promise. David, who served God, but as a human still fell short, will be honored through his lineage. Jesse, the father of David, will be the root from which Messiah will grow.

Then, we hear how the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Messiah. Wisdom, understanding, counsel, power, and knowledge will all be given. He won't judge like a man, based on what he sees on the surface, whether you are rich or poor, weak or strong. But He will rule and judge with divine righteousness.

This season, we celebrate the Son that God sent to rescue man from sin. To be born as a child, to live his life as a man. To experience the same temptations but with the power to overcome them. To finally be the once-and-for-all sacrifice for our sin. A promise laid out in Isaiah 700 years before it happened, yet each detail happened as prophesied. Consistently keeping each promise that was made.

Discussion Question: What do we learn about God's plan to save his people through this passage?

December 18

Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12

“By His Wounds We Are Healed”

By Debbie Davis, Bethany Staff

“Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering... and by his wounds we are healed.” Isaiah 53:4-5

Waiting is hard. Every year during Advent, I think about this. The time between the Old Testament and New Testament was about 400 years...of waiting for a Savior that would bring redemption and peace.

God spoke to His people through his prophet Isaiah about a coming hope...but it wasn't what they expected. Isaiah spoke of a Savior who was coming to be a servant and who would save them, not through force and control, but by suffering. The Messiah would be “despised and rejected... pierced for our transgressions... crushed for our iniquities.”

How could this be? How was this good news? It is good though. It's where I see God's faithfulness clearly...entering the pain and brokenness of humanity. Every mistake, misdeed, blatant disobedience, abuse, grief, offense our Savior is well acquainted with and bears these things on our behalf. What kind of Savior does that?

There are times in my life where I've doubted whether God was really keeping His promises to me. In my limited understanding, I thought it was taking too long or the outcome was not what I thought was good. I wanted Him to fix things quickly, and to make sense of the suffering. But Isaiah's vision reminds me that

God's faithfulness often looks different from what I expect. He doesn't always take away the pain in my timing, but He always bears it Himself and is always with me.

Isaiah described Jesus as a Servant — the one who would carry our griefs and heal us through His wounds. The promise God made ages earlier kept in a way no one could have imagined: He took on flesh, entered our brokenness, and died for our redemption. Advent invites me to remember that — to trust God is still writing the story He promised to complete...even when my faith has not yet become my sight.

And there it is. True Love.

This love drew me to Jesus as a young girl who was all too acquainted with fear and sadness. And it continues to draw me to Jesus to this day. God sees our pain, enters our darkness, and brings healing where we least expect it.

So this Advent, I want to wait like Isaiah did — with hope anchored not in what I see, but in who God is, faithful. To have my eyes wide open. To believe and then see — see His goodness in the land of the living.

And God does see — He sees our pain, enters our darkness and brings healing in the most unlikely and miraculous ways; big and small. The God who was faithful then will be faithful now. And because Jesus has come, we can face the waiting with quiet confidence: and when it's all a bit too much, remembering God is with us personally gives us strength and hope. By His wounds...by His love, we are healed.

Discussion Question: Is there an area you are waiting for God to bring hope or healing? How does remembering that He has been faithful to fulfill His promises help you in the waiting?

December 19

Read Jeremiah 31:27-37

“Worth Waiting For”

By Kahryn and Dave Darjany, Bethany Members

Waiting rooms are hard. When I sit in those rigid chairs under fluorescent lights, I'm forced to confront the discomfort of a physical ailment or need. Something is broken or sick within me. I need help. I'm waiting for clarity, guidance, and relief. The tension, the uncertainty, and the vulnerability of the moment all bring to the surface a longing for attention and resolve.

When I enter into the book of Jeremiah, I join the Israelites in the discomfort of waiting in their unresolved tension, as well. This book recounts the proclamations from the Lord made by Jeremiah of coming judgments that the Lord's chosen people have brought upon themselves through their unfaithfulness to the covenant that God established with them through Moses.

God invited the Israelites, this chosen nation, to follow His life-giving laws, receive His blessings, and represent Him to the rest of humanity (see Duet 30). Unfortunately, the Israelites did not uphold their end of the bargain. As a result, the Lord allowed them to experience the painful consequences of the covenant: being “*uprooted, demolished, destroyed*” (v 28) and ultimately exiled into Babylon. Yet, somehow, in what should feel like a prognosis of terminal illness, they instead received this declaration of hope: “*I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more*” (v 34).

The Great Physician of our souls speaks up and reassures. He comes alongside and continues to remain with His people. What

a thrill of hope! In the weariness of this world, there is reason to rejoice! This gracious God continues to draw near and make a way for intimacy, transformation and redemption. Even for those who have been unfaithful.

How often do I find myself tempted to crumple under the guilt of what I have done or left undone? Or trudge through life hiding from the Lord in a place of shame? In those hopeless moments, do I attempt to manage, fix, toil and strive? Trying to reassure the Lord: *"I've gotten myself here, and I can get myself out?"* Or is there another way?

Pause. Confess. Receive His grace. Healing. Mercy. Love. Again and again.

Each time, standing on the other side, I realize His invitation to rest was always there. The waiting room is over, the Good Physician is here and has been all along. And the prognosis? It's the best news ever...the pains were actually contractions! Birth pains! Invitation into new life! Life with Him! He is present, He is faithful, He is intimately involved and I am personally seen, known, forgiven and loved.

What a great hope is birthed in remembering that God is present and faithful to each and to all. The new covenant partnership established through Jesus brings peace and hope. Knowing that He has come already, and yet He is not finished. One day we will be even more fully renewed, living face to face in intimacy with our God and King. Now that is worth waiting for!

Discussion Question: What do we learn about God's plan to save his people through this passage?

December 20

Read Daniel 6-7

“Faithfulness in the Fire, Anchored in Eternal Hope”

By Kevin Mayfield Hom, Bethany Elder

If you grew up in the church, you probably have heard the story of Daniel many times—especially the dramatic rescue from the lions’ den. It always made me reflect on the question: *Am I living a radical life for God that could put me in a situation where I must choose between my safety and my faith?* While the question of living radically for God is still relevant, when I read Daniel 6 and 7 together as an adult, I uncover a deeper message: one that speaks to integrity, quiet resistance, and enduring a life of faithfulness in a world that feel increasingly unstable.

Daniel 6:4 says that the Satraps (leaders) tried to get some dirt on Daniel, “But they could find no charge or corruption, for he was trustworthy, and no negligence or corruption was found in him.” Daniel was living under a government that he didn’t choose, yet he remained such an upstanding citizen with so much integrity that the leaders couldn’t find anything to hold against him. They had to change the law to catch him. To that point, Daniel abided by the laws of the government placed over him, *until* they asked him to go against God.

When the edict was given that intended to stop him from praying to God, then and only then did he rebel. But he didn’t force his way into the King’s court demanding that policy be changed to where everyone else had to match *his* convictions. Instead, he quietly and privately remained obedient to God and allowed his faithfulness and counterculture actions to be an example of God’s power. The rest of the story then plays out, and Daniel’s

faithfulness to God reaches the heart of the King and initiates an organic change of policy.

Daniel's personal integrity in Chapter 6 sets the stage for the vision he must interpret in Chapter 7. One shows us how to live faithfully in the *present*; the other reminds us of the *ultimate hope* that anchors our faith.

In Daniel 7, the prophet receives a vision of four terrifying beasts, each representing empires that would rise and fall. An arrogant leader that intends to oppress God and His people comes at the pinnacle of this vision. Then amid the chaos and fear, Daniel sees "one like a son of man" coming with the clouds of heaven. This figure is given authority, glory, and sovereign power—His kingdom will never be destroyed.

The vision shifts our focus from present turmoil to future hope. It reminds us that God's faithfulness is not limited to moments of crisis; it extends into eternity. The "Son of Man" is the little baby Jesus that we eagerly await, whose eternal reign will bring justice, peace, and restoration to a broken world.

Discussion Question: While it can be our natural reaction to lose hope in all the "chaos" of our world, how do we see God being faithful to his promises in this passage?

December 21

Read Luke 1:5-56

“Waiting”

By Deb Lee, Bethany Member

Zechariah was a priest, Elizabeth was of good lineage, both of them righteous and favored in the eyes of the Lord... a real power couple, if you will. While this passage doesn't mention how long they waited for a child, we can imagine it was a very long time, as their old age is really emphasized. What a weird situation all around. First, you have a terrifying encounter with an angel appearing out of nowhere (I scream when someone walks around a corner!) Then, when you try to relay the story, not only will your spouse think you're insane, but you've also lost your voice and can't explain anything, anyway. No wonder Elizabeth went into seclusion for five months! That's probably how long it would take me to process everything, too! Not to mention, she probably didn't want to explain to her community *how* she was pregnant and *why* her husband no longer speaks.

I hate waiting and being in the unknown. But unfortunately, I am also pretty good at it. I am not sure if I can credit that to my years teaching Kindergarten for increasing my patience and resilience tenfold, or just my weird life experiences, but there is something weirdly familiar when I find myself waiting again. So much so, that when seasons of waiting end, I sometimes struggle to believe the reality. In this latest season of waiting, I found myself saying "I know that God is working" which is not my usual response. When those close to me ask why I say that, I explain that I don't have an example of a period of waiting that has gone to waste. In my darkest hours, in the times I thought that somehow the Lord had overlooked me, I can now look back and not only see what

He was doing but also see how His plan was far better than mine. I can even see how He used those real and raw emotions to wrestle with and deepen my relationship with Him.

Shortly after my husband and I married in 2023, my then 100-year-old grandmother called me and said she wanted to share something, but she was hesitant because she is used to people saying she has lost her mind. She remained adamant that I had to know and asked if I would give her the benefit of the doubt. While making her morning coffee, she said she had clearly heard the Lord's voice tell her that I would have a baby boy someday, and he would do big things and be very important. Now, normally, I probably wouldn't believe her. However, it seems as if she has a direct line with the Lord because she once told me she already knew when I'd meet my husband in 2021 and then confidently stopped praying and even told the Lord "I'm not praying for Deborah to meet her husband anymore." When she told me this, I had only been dating my husband for a few months and hadn't even told her yet. Of course she was right, therefore, as crazy as it seems, it's hard to not believe that she may be right about a baby boy someday.

But back to Luke's story, later in the passage, after Mary has her own experience with an angel bringing her own news, she immediately goes to find Elizabeth, who validates her by responding without any context at all "blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" May that be our response to more things as we credit the Lord for being at work in our lives. While we sometimes don't know the promises He has in store for us, blessed are we for being able to trust Him.

Discussion Question: What do we learn about God's plan to save his people through this passage?



Silent Night! Holy Night

And they... found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe in the manger

1. Si - lent night! ho - ly night!
2. Si - lent night! ho - ly night!
3. Si - lent night! ho - ly night!

Hark! the Herald Angels Sing

And suddenly there was... a multitude of the heavenly host praising God

Luke 2:13

Advent Activities

Christmas Carol

Supplies Needed:

- Christmas Carol Lyrics
- Details from Matthew 1-2, Luke 1-2
- Paper, crayons, pens

Instructions:

First, choose some of your favorite Christmas carols. Find the lyrics then listen to and/or sing along to your favorite version.

Then read through the Christmas story and compare it to your favorite carol to find which details the carols are taking directly from scripture.

It can also be interesting to look up the history behind your favorite Christmas carols to find out who wrote them, when, and how the song came to be.

Encourage kids to draw a picture representing their favorite Christmas carol and what they learned about it.

Want Extra credit? Join Bethany Church on Christmas Eve on Wednesday, December 24 at 5:30 PM as we sing Christmas carols together and retell the story of Christ's birth.

December 22

Read Luke 1:57-80

“Unexpected”

By Lindsay Darjany, Bethany Member

When the time came for me to give birth to my first child, it looked a little different than what I had expected, hoped and prayed for. I had spent the last few months on doctor's orders to stay close to home, not expend too much energy, and had a scheduled C-section to deliver my baby one month early due to a life-threatening pregnancy complication.

The doctors were worried that her lungs would not be fully developed because she was premature, but we were all relieved when her newborn screams almost blew the doors off of the building. **We all rejoiced!**

When we finally brought her home, even our sweet neighbor two doors down told me to leave the windows open so she could hear our daughter cry. This time in our lives was new, scary, and uncharted. I believed God would have mercy on us, but I didn't know what that would look like.

The passage of John the Baptist's entry into this world reminds me that God is faithful, although his promises might look different from what we expected. Even the people of the hill country wondered about God's plan when they asked, "What then will this child *turn out to be*?"

In this passage, God shows himself true to his word, even though Zechariah and Elizabeth might have had other ideas for themselves and for their son. God often has revealed himself in paradoxes, and this passage is no different.

An old woman, now a new mom

An old tradition of naming, a new given name

A small child, a prophet

Slotted for a temple, obedient in the wilderness

A shining light on those who sit in darkness

This Advent season, we remember the anticipation of a merciful Savior. I am reminded that I can trust God, even when his plan is difficult to understand. Now I know that even if His promise-fulfilled looks new, different, or challenging, He will guide my feet into a way of peace with His tender mercy and love.

Discussion Question: How do you see God being faithful to his promises in this passage?

December 23

Read Luke 2:1-7

“An Inexpressible Gift”

By Ray Hadley, Bethany Member

I read the story of a woman who was very busy on the day before Christmas. She had her little son with her, running from store to store for some last-minute gift buying. She had made her purchases and was ready to rush home and finish decorating the house. Her son, however, was at that moment looking at a nativity scene. He said eagerly to his mother, “Mommy, look! It’s Jesus. There’s the baby Jesus in his crib.” Without even slowing down, the mother grabbed him by the arm and said, “Come on, we’re in a hurry. We don’t have time for that!”

Christmastime can be so hectic! Can we slow things down some? Let’s return to *the simplicity of the Christmas story* in Luke 2:1-7. Let’s focus anew on the very simple story of our Lord’s birth. Nothing flashy about the story. Nothing unusual. A man and his wife go on a journey. While gone, the woman has a baby. Yes, Luke does add some other details; but all in all, that’s the basic story. It’s both brief and simple. And there’s nothing flashy or supernatural to it.

That’s not to say that there’s nothing supernatural going on. In chapter 1, the angel Gabriel appears first to Zechariah, and then later to Mary. He informs Mary that she would have a baby, conceived in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit and without the aid of any man – all of this because the Messiah was coming! And then starting in 2:8, more supernatural happenings. First, an angel appears to some shepherds. Then a whole host of the heavenly beings appear on the scene. All of this

is because the Messiah had come! But sandwiched in between is Luke 2:1-7 and the actual birth of Jesus.

Verses 1-3 give *the Roman setting*.

The Roman emperor? Caesar Augustus.

The Syrian governor? Quirinius.

The birth of Jesus set in motion by what? A census.

Verses 4-5 present *the Jewish setting*.

Joseph was pledged to be married to Mary, who was expecting a child.

They travel from Nazareth (in Galilee) to Bethlehem (in Judea).

Finally, verses 6-7 is *the actual birth* itself. With no room in the inn, Jesus was placed in a manger – a feeding trough for animals.

Such was the ignoble entrance of our Savior into this world. The Word ... became flesh. The Creator ... became part of his creation. Yes, a simple story; yet so, so profound! What does it all mean?

Paul summarizes the story well in 2 Corinthians 8:9: *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*

Jesus did it for you and me. Paul's response in 2 Corinthians 9:15 can also be our response: *Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!*

Discussion Question: What do we learn about God's plan to save his people through this passage?

December 24

Read Luke 2:8-20

"Shepherds' Night: A Divine Encounter"

By Reg Samuels, Bethany Elder

In the quiet of the night, an extraordinary encounter unfolded. Shepherds, tending their flocks in the fields near Bethlehem, were met with a heavenly host, proclaiming the birth of Jesus. This passage invites us to reflect on the significance of this event and its relevance to our lives.

The shepherds, often marginalized and overlooked, were chosen to receive this revelation. They exemplify those who are open to God's presence and prompt to respond. The angel's words, "Fear not!" offer comfort and reassurance, reminding us that God's presence dispels fear.

The shepherds' response is remarkable. They "hurried" to find the newborn Jesus, worshiped him, and spread the news. Their encounter with the divine transformed them, compelling them to share the good news with others.

This passage encourages us to be receptive to God's presence in our lives. Just as the shepherds were attentive to the angels' message, may we be sensitive to God's whispers in our hearts. As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, may we, like the shepherds, respond with worship, gratitude, and a desire to share the good news with others.

good news of Jesus' birth with others?

Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ. May we, like the shepherds, be open to Your presence and prompt to respond. Help us to worship and glorify You in all we do. Amen.

Questions: How do you respond to God's presence in your life? In what ways can you be more attentive to God's whispers in your heart? How can you share the good news of Jesus' birth with others?

*We hope you'll join us tonight for Bethany's
Candlelight Christmas Eve Service at 5:30pm.*



CHRISTMAS EVE
service at 5:30pm

December 25

Read John 1:1-14

“Jesus is the Light of The World”

By Benjamin Overby, Bethany's Lead Pastor

On this day, we celebrate the birth of Jesus. We celebrate the Word becoming flesh to live among us. Jesus was sent to earth by God the Father out of His great love for us. But Jesus did not arrive to great fanfare like a mighty king or conquering hero. But rather, He arrived as a baby, in a small town with almost no fanfare or public announcement. And yes, that's how Jesus' life on earth began. But that is not the true beginning of Jesus' impact on our lives and in our world.

John reminds us that Jesus always was. He was here in the beginning before Creation. His power was displayed in creation as new things sprung into existence at His word. Before His work in creation, there was only darkness. But Jesus created light, both the physical lights that we see in the world like the sun, moon, and stars and spiritual light, the light of salvation. His life and death and resurrection are the beacon that points us towards a renewed relationship with God.

As John tells us, salvation and eternal life are available to all who would receive him, who would put their faith and trust in Him above all other things. It isn't about being born into the right family or the right nationality. It isn't about trying to do as many good things as you can.

But it is about believing in Jesus.

Believing that He is God.

Believing that He was born in Bethlehem to a young woman named Mary.

Believing that He came to earth to rescue us from sin and death.

Believing that He lovingly and sacrificially gave His life on the cross for our salvation.

Believing that He rose again on the third day, conquering death and sin.

Believing that one day all those who receive Him will be with Him forever.

On this Christmas Day, remember that it represents a new beginning, yes, a new birth of God's Son. But also, God entering the world in a new way so that we could see the light of the world, the light of salvation through Jesus.

Question: What have we learned about God's plan to save his people through the scriptures in this devotional? How have we seen God's promises fulfilled? How has God's plan for salvation made a difference in your life?

The Birth of Jesus

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered. This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So everyone went to be registered, each to his own town.

Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. 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, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger."

Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:

***Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to people he favors!***



When the angels had left them and returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”

They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the manger. After seeing them, they reported the message they were told about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard, which were just as they had been told.

BETHANY
CHURCH
LONG BEACH

2250 Clark Avenue, Long Beach CA 90815
562-597-2411 | bethanylb.org