

4-SESSION ADVENT BIBLE STUDY

CELEBRATING THE
GOOD NEWS OF CHRISTMAS

VIDEO
ACCESS
INCLUDED


Joy to the World

LIFEWAY WOMEN

With Music by ELLIE HOLCOMB



Joy
TO
THE
World



Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! the Savior reigns;
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders of His love.

week one

The Lord
IS
COME



Our study begins by celebrating the good news of Jesus's birth—the Incarnation. This event is the ultimate example of the goodness and grace of God who sent His Son to be a living sacrifice for our sins. What better cause for rejoicing do we have than this?



MEMORY VERSE

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.
We observed his glory, the glory as the one and
only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

Watch

Watch the video “Session One: The Lord Is Come” and use the space below to take notes.



To access the video teaching sessions, use the instructions in the back of your Bible study book.

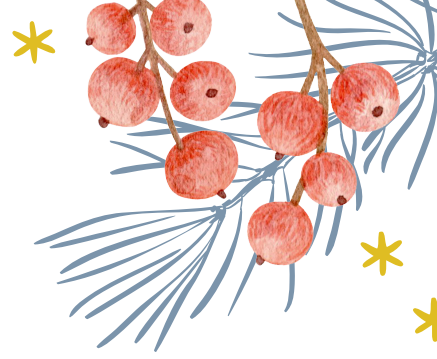


Discuss

Use this page to take notes during your group time and to keep a record of prayer requests that are mentioned. A leader guide with discussion questions is available for download at [lifeway.com/joytotheworld](https://www.lifeway.com/joytotheworld).



Day One



THE PROMISED ONE

MATTHEW 1:1-17

by Kelly D. King

My Grandma “D” had an infectious laugh. When she laughed, everyone laughed. It was a bit loud, and when she got tickled, it would linger. I always enjoyed being at her house during the holidays when it was full of aunts, uncles, and cousins, because that distinctive laugh was passed down from one generation to another. The entire house seemed to reverberate with laughter and joy, whether they were pulling a prank, competing in a board game, or cooking in the kitchen.

I proudly inherited her laugh, and when my daughter first laughed in the same way, I thought to myself, *She’s one of us*. Four generations with a similar and distinctive laugh passed from one generation to the next.

It’s amazing to see the traits and nuances that pass down through generations. Some of these traits may be harder to spot for you than others, especially depending on how well you know your family history, your birth parents, and so on. But we all have distinct physical and personality features that are through lines in our family trees. Keep in mind the importance of family history and lineage as we begin our study, because Jesus’s family history holds some of the most important keys to our understanding of why His Advent—His first coming—changed everything.

OPEN YOUR BIBLE TO MATTHEW 1 AND READ VERSES 1-17.

Good stories have a good beginning, and Matthew’s introduction in verse 1 echoes the good beginning of Genesis 1:1. In fact, the Greek word for our English phrase “of the genealogy” in Matthew 1:1 is *génésis*.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

An account of the genealogy [*génésis*] of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham . . .

Matthew 1:1

Both opening verses to the Old and New Testaments signal something seismic is unfolding. Can you sense it? God spoke creation into existence, and “it was good” (Gen. 1). Then with the arrival of Jesus—who the Gospel writer John describes as “the Word” of God (John 1:1)—into our world, God did something even better. Jesus’s genealogy will show readers how He was the fulfillment of promise after promise that God made. Specifically, the Gospel of Matthew describes how the birth of Jesus fulfills God’s promise to one man (Abraham), through one nation (the Israelites), and expands the promise to all people (including you and me). Let’s take a closer look.

REREAD MATTHEW 1:1.

In verse 1, Matthew emphasized four names to help his readers understand why this beginning and this genealogy is different than others.

1. JESUS

The first name, *Jesus*, was a common Jewish name and in Hebrew it is translated *Joshua*, which means “Yahweh saves.” This was important to Matthew’s readers not only because it connected the identity of Jesus as the Son but also because it connected Jesus to the salvation He would bring to them.

2. CHRIST

The second name, *Christ*, means “anointed,” which pointed to Jesus’s identity as a leader who was expected to bring in an age of peace and freedom from oppression. *Christ* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *mashiach*, meaning “the Messiah” or “Anointed One.” Although God’s people in Matthew’s day were waiting for a leader who would bring them freedom from oppression and overthrow the Romans, Matthew’s Gospel would show how Jesus the Christ brought an even better freedom—spiritual freedom from the bondage of sin only accomplished through the cross.

3. THE SON OF DAVID

Matthew referred to Jesus as *the Son of David*. This description reveals another important aspect of His identity—the fulfillment of Jesus’s royal lineage through the family of David. Jews would keep extensive genealogies to establish a person’s legitimacy and inheritance rights. The genealogy here is traced through Joseph, Jesus’s legal (though not biological) father, and it established His claim and right to the throne of David.

LOOK UP AND READ 2 SAMUEL 7:12-16. AS YOU READ,
IDENTIFY THE PROMISE GOD MADE DAVID.

God promised David that a never-ending kingdom would come through David's lineage. Many earthly kings followed David, but until Jesus, none were able to fulfill that promise. Here Matthew established Jesus as the Son of David whose rule will never end.

4. THE SON OF ABRAHAM

Matthew began Jesus's genealogy with Abraham, and verses 2-6 track Abraham's family tree through fourteen generations leading up to King David. Among the many Old Testament promises Jesus's birth fulfilled is one very important one—God's promise to Abraham that through him and his descendants would spring forth the family of God.

Now the word of the LORD came to him: "This one will not be your heir; instead, one who comes from your own body will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look at the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "Your offspring will be that numerous."

Genesis 15:4-5

Jesus's birth was not God's backup plan. Instead, Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to redeem humanity from the brokenness of sin (Gen. 3:15). In the genealogy of Jesus, we see God's faithfulness through generations and proof that He is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament.

In Genesis 18:9-15, Sarah laughed when the Lord revealed His promise to Abraham that a son would come from her. I like to think this wasn't only an inward giggle, but more like the belly laugh of my grandmother. I'm sure Sarah's laugh would also be passed down from one generation to the next as they retold the story of Isaac's birth—all the way to the birth of the Promised One—Jesus.

My Grandma "D"'s last name was DeLaughter. How appropriate that the word *laugh* would be included in her married name. Just as she brought great joy that has been transferred from one generation to the next, the lineage and the fulfilled promise of the birth of Christ brings great joy for all people.



STUDY & REFLECT

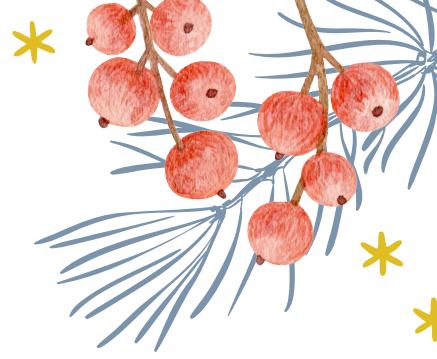
We considered only a few of the many interesting details in Jesus's genealogy. What stands out to you from Matthew 1:1-17? Note at least three things.

The theme of God's faithfulness is central to the Bible and to the Christmas story. How are you trusting in God's faithfulness and promise-keeping nature today?

What prayer concerns do you need to take to the Lord on behalf of your family?

How can you demonstrate joy in Christ today?

Day Two



THE SON OF GOD

LUKE 1:26-38

by Janice Gaines

I come from a very musical family full of talented men and women who sing, play instruments, and write songs. I grew up watching musicals and going to concerts as a part of our everyday lives. In my teens I joined a professional choir and did as much singing around town as I could. So, when I went to college and declared that I would be a pre-med student, I got plenty of quizzical looks and blank stares from those who knew me well. Everyone assumed I would pursue music at college.

Fast forward a couple of years and one of my favorite musicals—*The Wiz*—was announced as the next production put on by my school's theater department. I couldn't believe it! I just *had* to be in the chorus for that production; it would be a great balance to the science major that I was working to complete.

I prepared myself to audition for the chorus, and I made my way into the room with an intimidating panel that would be deciding who got to be a part of the musical. Regardless of what part we were hoping to play, they made everyone sing, dance, and read parts to get an idea of what we could all do. We had several rounds of auditioning, and at the end of the night, they let me know that they were deciding between me and another young lady *for the lead role!* In the next little while, I found out that I had in fact been chosen to play the role of Dorothy. I couldn't believe my ears! I was already excited that the production would be done at my school because I knew how awesome it was; never had I imagined I would be cast in the starring role. It was such an unexpected honor.

This is the closest feeling I have (and I realize it doesn't even come close) to how I imagine Mary might have felt as the angel Gabriel gave her the news of the part that she would play in God's grand story—the virgin mother of the promised Messiah who was coming to rescue her and her people. The action of the Christmas story begins in today's text, with the angel Gabriel's pronouncement that Mary would give birth to the Son of God.

OPEN YOUR BIBLE TO THE GOSPEL OF LUKE AND READ
LUKE 1:26-38.

Before we even learn Mary's name in this text, we learn a detail of critical importance to the Christmas story: Mary was a virgin. As we read on, we learn Mary would become pregnant through the divine work of the Holy Spirit. This event is known as the immaculate conception, and it fulfills a prophecy from the book of Isaiah:

Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin
will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:14

We can rejoice in the fact that God had a plan for our redemption long before we knew we needed a Savior!

Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you
will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son
of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of
his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever,
and his kingdom will have no end.

Luke 1:31-33

That Mary, a virgin, would have a baby was news enough, but Gabriel told her much more than that. He told her she would bear the long-awaited Messiah, “the expected king of the Davidic line who would deliver Israel from foreign bondage and restore the glories of its golden age.”¹ Gabriel used key words and language such as “Son of the Most High” and “throne of his father David” that certainly brought to mind all of the promises in the Scriptures that Israel would again have a King who would rule forever this time.² After being ruled by others politically for hundreds of years, the people of Israel were anxiously waiting for the Messiah to return and restore their national and political freedom.³

One glance at the Magnificat—Mary's song of praise that begins in Luke 1:46—reveals that this young woman was deeply familiar with and understood the Scriptures. She knew for herself that the Messiah had been promised, and she eagerly awaited His arrival for her own life. The Scriptures had profoundly impacted her, shaping even her personal hopes.

And Mary said:
My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
because he has looked with favor
on the humble condition of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations
will call me blessed,
because the Mighty One
has done great things for me,
and his name is holy.

Luke 1:46-49

I have often believed, with all my heart, in God's ability to perform miracles for other people. I have sometimes had greater faith for what God was going to do through someone else than I did for what God wanted to do through me. This year, though, I am opening my eyes to the ways in which God wants me to take more of a lead role in my corner of the world for His sake.

You don't need to worry about making a grand plan of your own either. The Holy Spirit will guide you, as God continues to make a way where there is no way. As verse 37 says, "For nothing will be impossible with God." You and I only need to have the proper response. May we respond like Mary and say,

See, I am the Lord's servant . . .
May it happen to me as you have said.

Luke 1:38



STUDY & REFLECT

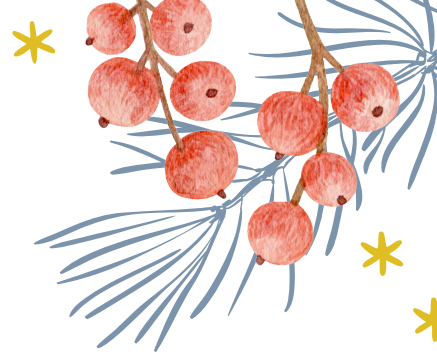
Review Luke 1:26-38 and write down everything you learn about Jesus from Gabriel's words to Mary.

Have you ever been waiting on God to change a situation that only He could change? Maybe even now? Write about it here.

How might God be asking you to take on a lead role of spreading the joy and hope of Jesus this Advent season?

Use the remaining space to write down a verse you want to remember from today's reading or a brief prayer.

Day Three



MAGNIFICENT PRAISE

LUKE 1:46-55

by Erin Franklin

My grandparents got married in December of 1965 in a small-town church. Their wedding was also the same day as the town's annual Christmas parade. My grandfather said that as my grandmother walked down the aisle, the doors of the church blew open, and the Christmas parade happened to be marching down the street outside at the same time—the festive music came through loud and clear. So, instead of “Here Comes the Bride,” my grandmother walked down the aisle to “Here Comes Santa Claus”!

Whether part of a wedding, birthday party, or high school graduation, we have songs that mark important milestones in our lives. Music is an important part of celebration; it holds the power to help us verbalize our emotions as well as remember important moments, even when they don't go as planned. Songs can unite us with our contemporaries as well as those who have gone before us, and they often serve as markers in our lives.

Mary's song in Luke 1, also known as the Magnificat, was sung more than two thousand years ago, yet its lyrics still impact us today. It's a song of praise, beauty, unity, submission to God, and strength. You read a short section of it yesterday, but let's read it in full now.

READ LUKE 1:46-55.

In her song, Mary delights in different attributes of God's character, including His holiness, might, mercy, faithfulness, and compassion. She sings of God's greatness by declaring the many actions He has done. She shows her faith in God as she reflects on His faithfulness to His promises, like we saw in our study of Matthew 1.

Mary's song lifts praise to the Lord. She humbles herself. Rather than accept any praise of her own character, she continually points back to God. Her heart is one of humility. Her “soul magnifies the Lord” (v. 46) and her “spirit rejoices” in her Savior (v. 47). She confidently believes that generations to come will call her blessed not because of anything she did, but because of the Lord's loving-kindness to her (vv. 48-49).

We don't know a lot of details about Mary's personality, but through her song, we see her heart. And her heart is one positioned in a posture of gratitude and joy before her heavenly Father. Understanding that this song is filled with Old Testament references, we can also see Mary's heart for treasuring knowledge about God. This heart posture is visible in other encounters we have with Mary in the Gospel of Luke.

READ THE FOLLOWING TWO PASSAGES AND UNDERLINE WHAT YOU'RE TOLD ABOUT MARY.

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.

Luke 2:17-19

"Why were you searching for me?" he asked them. "Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother kept all these things in her heart.

Luke 2:49-51

In Luke 2, we're given a peek into Mary's heart. After the shepherds saw the Christ child, they went out and spread the word to others who were "amazed" at what the shepherds told them (v. 18). "But Mary treasured up all these things and *pondered them in her heart*" (v. 19, NIV, emphasis added). In the Greek, the word here translated *treasured* means to "preserve, keep, protect; keep in one's memory."⁴ And again, after Mary couldn't find Jesus when He was in the temple, Luke 2:51 says that Mary "treasured all these things in her heart" (NIV).

Mary didn't have a printed Old Testament like you and I have today that we can read and reread to reference a particular verse. Rather, she grew up hearing the Old Testament stories read to her aloud time and again.

CONSIDER SOME OF THE OLD TESTAMENT PARALLELS THAT ARE CONTAINED IN MARY'S SONG.

<i>NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGE</i>	<i>OLD TESTAMENT PARALLEL</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">LUKE 1:49</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and his name is holy.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">DEUTERONOMY 10:21</p> <p style="text-align: center;">He is your praise and he is your God, who has done for you these great and awe-inspiring works your eyes have seen.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">LUKE 1:50</p> <p style="text-align: center;">His mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear him.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">PSALM 103:17</p> <p style="text-align: center;">But from eternity to eternity the LORD’s faithful love is toward those who fear him, and his righteousness toward the grandchildren.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">LUKE 1:51-53</p> <p style="text-align: center;">He has done a mighty deed with his arm; he has scattered the proud because of the thoughts of their hearts; he has toppled the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly. He has satisfied the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">1 SAMUEL 2:7-8</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The LORD brings poverty and gives wealth; he humbles and he exalts. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the trash heap. He seats them with noblemen and gives them a throne of honor. For the foundations of the earth are the LORD’s; he has set the world on them.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">LUKE 1:54-55</p> <p style="text-align: center;">He has helped his servant Israel, remembering his mercy to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he spoke to our ancestors.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ISAIAH 41:8-9</p> <p style="text-align: center;">But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, descendant of Abraham, my friend—I brought you from the ends of the earth and called you from its farthest corners. I said to you: You are my servant; I have chosen you; I haven’t rejected you.⁵</p>

It’s clear Mary treasured God’s Word in her heart so much that in a moment of overwhelming joy, she could not help but proclaim God’s goodness by singing His Word. Let’s take a deeper look at one of these Old Testament passages that may have informed Mary’s song.

LOOK UP AND READ 1 SAMUEL 2:1-10.

With Hannah and Mary, we read about two women who glorified God and trusted in His power to lift up the needy. Both show us a faith and confidence that God will act out of His power in their own lives to tear down those who oppose Him. And both show us pictures of what it looks like to rejoice *in* the Lord.

As we go forward into this Advent season, may we, like Mary, treasure God's Word in our hearts. May we be so devoted to our God that the Spirit of the Lord speaks through us in moments of pure joy by proclaiming the good news found in His Word. May we see Mary's song as an example of the joyful response the good news of Jesus's birth should stir up in us.

STUDY & REFLECT

READ THROUGH LUKE 1:46-55 AND 1 SAMUEL 2:1-10 ONCE MORE.

Summarize what these two songs teach you about the Lord.

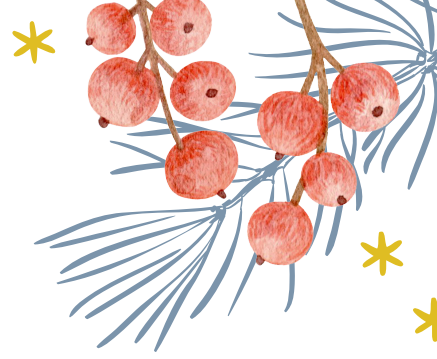
What do they teach you about a right posture before Him?

List some practical ways you can treasure God's Word in your heart during this Advent season.

As a written prayer or voiced aloud, compose your own song of praise to God for who He is and how He is at work in you.



Day Four



THE LORD IS COME

JOHN 1:1-18

by Y Bonesteel

Every Christmas season, I set up a large Nativity scene that includes the townspeople of Bethlehem: the tentmaker, the breadmaker, the soldiers, the shepherds, the silversmith, and many others. It takes me a few days to set up every piece. But when I get to baby Jesus, He is so small that I sometimes have a hard time finding Him. I'm amazed at how this little, plastic baby is a representation of the God who became flesh.

The Gospel of John begins with a version of the Christmas story that offers us a peek behind the heavenly curtain. With John's words, we gain a clearer understanding of Jesus's divine nature and what He undertook when He entered humanity to redeem and save His people so that we might be called children of God.

LOOK THROUGH JOHN 1:1-18, WHICH IS KNOWN AS THE PROLOGUE TO JOHN'S GOSPEL.

The beginning of John alludes to the very beginning of God's Word—Genesis 1:1. John starts with "in the beginning," like Genesis. In Genesis, God spoke, and the world came into existence. In John 1:1, we're introduced to "the Word." This Word wasn't spoken though; He "was with God" and "was God" (v. 1). As you read on through these opening verses, it becomes evident "the Word" refers to Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus is one Person of the Trinity, which means He is both *with* God and He *is* God. And as the Word, He was from the beginning creating, making, establishing, and sustaining alongside the Father and the Spirit.

LOOK THROUGH JOHN 1:1-9 AGAIN. IN YOUR COPY OF THE TEXT, MARK ANY REPEATED WORDS YOU NOTICE.

Repeated words in passages can help you determine the major subjects of that passage. For this passage in particular, you likely noted the repeated use of *God*, *created*, *light*, and *darkness*. With these images John described the Advent of the world and the Advent of Jesus on earth. The Triune God spoke light into the darkness at creation (Gen. 1:3) just as Jesus

the Son spoke light into the darkness of human sin and death. Through Jesus's death and resurrection, He gave life and the power of His resurrection to humankind—"in him was life, and that life was the light of men" (v. 4). Nothing could "overcome it" (v. 5).

It is incredibly humbling to consider that Jesus, who is from the beginning and is powerful and good enough to create the universe, still chose to come in human form to save humanity. He came for me and for you. And for the joy set before Him, He "endured the cross" (Heb. 12:2). Jesus is God and did not have to do anything for us. Yet, because of His love, He humbled Himself and sacrificed His life to save the world.

Christ gave us the power to overcome darkness through His own life. John the Baptist (the John being referenced in John 1:6-8) testified to Jesus as the light, as we do today. Through John's example, we're both encouraged in our faith and reminded to point to Jesus as "the true light" (v. 9). We ourselves, like John the Baptist, are mere beings. Only Jesus is the Word—the true light—who came into the world that He created, on a mission to save it.

Though Jesus came into the world for us, the world did not recognize Him. He first came to the Jews—the chosen people of God from Abraham's lineage (Gen. 12), but they rejected Him. John reminds readers of this for both a warning and an exhortation. Everyone is given an opportunity to know Jesus as Lord, but you are given a choice to receive Him or not. Only one choice gives light.

**But to all who did receive him,
he gave them the right to be
children of God,
to those who believe in his name.**

John 1:12

In verse 12, John described a person's relationship with Jesus using two key phrases: "receive him" and "believe in his name." Both phrases refer to believing Jesus is the Son of God who came into the world to take away sin. That faith—nothing else—is what God uses to transform us into His children (vv. 12-13). In other words, there is nothing we can do on our own to be called children of God. Only God can make us such as we trust and believe in Him.

Sometimes it's easy to take for granted the fact that God considers us His children. Perhaps you've grown up with that notion, so it doesn't amaze you as much anymore.

But if we take a moment to reflect on the idea that we are children of God—you are His beloved child!—we should be taken aback, humbled, and overwhelmingly joy-filled. Not only does Jesus save us from eternal condemnation and darkness, He calls us into the light as His children, to be with Him forever.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

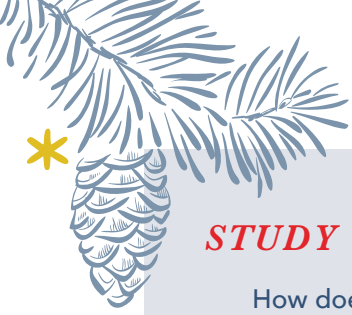
Here we reach the climax of John's prologue: "The Word (Jesus) became flesh and dwelt among us" (v. 14). God became flesh—lowered Himself to human form—in order to be with us, dwell in our midst, live a sinless life for us, and die on our behalf. Born a baby to be the Savior of the world.

Through Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection, we see the full picture of the rescue plan God orchestrated. His people witnessed His glory as the Son of the Father, "full of grace and truth" (v. 14). John the Baptist testified to Jesus as one coming after him but existing before him (v. 15), affirming Jesus's identity as the Son of God. Jesus, being God, uniquely accomplished our salvation out of His love and grace.

When we speak of God's grace, it's a reference to the undeserved nature of His love for us. The Son left His Father's side, became human, lived, died, and conquered death all "while we were still sinners" (Rom. 5:8). Through this unmerited favor, we are made pure and blameless before the Father. Because of grace, Jesus took the punishment of death for us. Grace, His perfect gift, is freely given and "lavished on us" (Eph. 1:6).

Joy to the world! The Lord is come. Let earth receive her King!

John 1 clearly reflects this popular Christmas carol. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus, the Lord, has come and thus, joy has come to the world. In receiving Him, believing Him, trusting that He is Savior and King, we have joy in our salvation. This Christmas, as we set up our Nativity scenes and see baby Jesus in a manger, we remember the magnitude of the first Advent: God humbled Himself to become a baby to come into this world in order to save us.



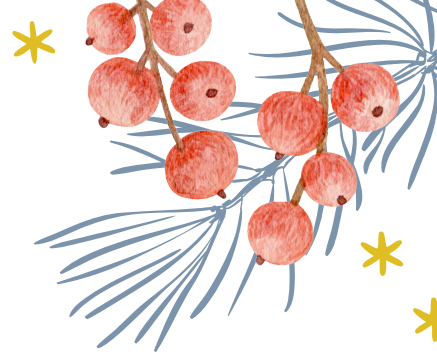
STUDY & REFLECT

How does knowing Jesus has existed from the very beginning inform the way you relate to Him?

READ BACK OVER JOHN 1:12-13. Reflect on your identity as a child of God, and write down one way this truth can be a source of joy for you today.

Think of one way you can reveal the grace and truth of Jesus this Christmas season to someone in need of it.

Day Five



AND HEAVEN AND NATURE SING

PSALM 96; PSALM 89:15-28

by Chelsea Waack

Close your eyes and imagine the perfect Christmas morning with me. I'm envisioning Christmas tree lights casting a warm glow across the living room, illuminating impeccably wrapped presents below. There's coffee brewing and cinnamon rolls in the oven already. Beautiful children bound down the stairs in matching pajamas well past 10 a.m., with smiles on their faces as they patiently wait for both parents to settle in with their mugs. Everyone takes turns opening presents and somehow all the wrapping paper makes it to the recycling bin by itself.

This kind of Christmas morning seems perfectly joyful to me, but it isn't real. Sometimes I chase a superficial kind of joy and fall short of experiencing the real thing.

Our houses may not always be decorated to the nines for the holiday season. We may be waking up early with children who are overstimulated and overwhelmed, or we could be waking up alone. Perhaps there are no presents under the tree this year, or no dining room table to gather around with family.

The realities of life often mean Christmas doesn't look how we imagine it. But the Christmas story in Scripture gives us a better, more hopeful picture to cling to. It gives us the reminder that in all situations, we can experience the fullness of joy that Jesus's birth offers.

LET EVERY HEART PREPARE HIM ROOM

For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.

John 3:16-18

If you grew up in church, I'd guess you memorized John 3:16. I did! But in light of everything we've studied this week, it takes on new meaning for me. Jesus's birth is the fulfillment of promises God made across generations, tracking all the way back to a promise He made in the garden to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15). This baby, born through the power of the Holy Spirit to Mary, is the very Son of God. God gave of Himself to right the wrongs we caused and draw us back into relationship with Him.

As each year brings new challenges, new disasters threatening to take over our world, and new or unexpected sorrows in life, it brings such sweet joy and peace to know that if we believe in Jesus, we will not be condemned, but have the promise of eternal life with Him. Those are the two Advents we celebrate this time of year—the one where Jesus came to save us, and the one where He will return to bring forever joy.

IN YOUR BIBLE, FIND AND READ PSALM 89:15-28.
MARK ALL THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD YOU SEE.

This psalm is like the Old Testament equivalent of “Joy to the World.” The psalmist reflects on the joy of God's people, a response that comes from knowing Him, reflecting on His character, and observing His work on behalf of His people.

Specifically in this psalm, we're told about God's righteousness, strength, protection, holiness, rule, provision, protection, and love. God is trustworthy to His very core, and this truth is to be a constant source of joy in the hearts of His children.

Happy are the people who know the joyful shout; LORD, they walk in the light from your face. They rejoice in your name all day long, and they are exalted by your righteousness.

Psalm 89:15-16

In yesterday's study of John 1, we were reminded that all it takes to be a child of God is belief in Him. For the psalmist, that relationship with the Lord ("they walk in the light from your face") leads to happiness. The word translated *happy* expresses "a sense of joy and satisfaction in one's state or circumstances. It often is the result of blessing that comes from trust in and obedience to the Lord."⁶

One of the reasons we're able to find great joy in this season of the year, regardless of our circumstances, is because we're reflecting on the love and light of our heavenly Father and remembering the depths of His love for us.

AND HEAVEN AND NATURE SING

The first stanza of "Joy to the World" ends with the phrase "and heaven and nature sing," a call for all of creation to rejoice in the good news of Jesus's birth. This idea of creation praising its Creator can be traced throughout Scripture.

READ PSALM 96.

God graced us with unique personalities and talents: singers, teachers, painters, gamers, musicians, managers, and then there's you! When we are living out what we love, our joy is on full display.

Sometimes joy in others is easier to spot than joy in my own life. That's why I like to look for glimmers of joy throughout my day—small, easy to miss moments that are deeply satisfying and remind me of something greater than myself. Glimmers of joy for me look like watching my four-year-old daughter smile in the mirror after I braid her hair in the morning or listening to birds and bugs chirping while sitting on my patio with an afternoon coffee.

May the words of Psalm 96 be one such glimmer of joy for you today.

Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice;
let the sea and all that fills it resound.
Let the fields and everything in them celebrate.
Then all the trees of the forest will shout for joy
before the LORD, for he is coming—
for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness
and the peoples with his faithfulness.

Psalm 96:11-13

Jesus has come once, and He is coming again. It is amazing to think about all things that God created in heaven and on earth joining together to rejoice when Jesus returns. We'll experience a joy greater than we can imagine as our entire world is healed and restored. No more war, natural disasters, famine, drought, and all the things that bring daily destruction around our globe. This Christmas season, as we anticipate Jesus's birth and longingly anticipate His return, let's shout for joy and sing songs to the Lord for all He has done and all He promises to make right.

STUDY & REFLECT

Our faithful God shows up for His faithful people. How did you see this in the psalms you read? How have you seen this proven true in your life recently?





How do you allow the busyness and traditions of the Christmas season to cloud your glimmers of joy and reasons to praise God?

Psalm 96 talked about the worthless idols we worship instead of the Lord. What worthless idols show up for you around Christmastime? Why is God so much better?

Set aside time this season to reorient your heart toward God and away from your own to-do list. Make a plan now for how to work this into your schedule, before Christmas travel or work obligations become all-consuming. Here are a few ideas to get you started. Then fill in your own ideas.

- Create character of God memory cards and go through them every morning leading up to Christmas.
- Thank God each day for a different attribute and reflect on how that specific attribute has helped you.
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