



CHRISTMAS

FIRST BAPTIST TRUSSVILLE

Advent 2021



*But the angel said to them,
“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news
that will cause great joy for all the people.
Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you;
He is the Messiah, the Lord.*

*“This will be a sign to you:
You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”*

*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host
appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,*

*“Glory to God in the highest Heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests.”*

Luke 2:10-14

May God's favor rest on *you* this Advent season,
and may *great joy* come upon you as you
focus on our Messiah, Jesus the Lord!
First Baptist Church Trussville

God is with us! Therefore we have HOPE.

*“The Lord Himself will give you the sign.
Look! The virgin will conceive a child!
She will give birth to a son and will call Him Immanuel
(which means God is with us).”
Isaiah 7:14*

From this verse we know that God is interested in us personally. So much so, that he personally gave us a sign. We know what that sign was because of Matthew's explanation of the meaning of the name that Jesus was given- Immanuel- Jesus coming to live as God with us, His presence is God's presence. His life is God's sign to us. The miracle of His conception is God's statement of Grace for us.

I can settle my heart on the fact that Jesus is God with us. He invaded a broken world to be with us. A world that deserved judgement and rebuke. And what did God provide? Himself with us! In the midst of my own tragedy in this broken world, I will choose to put my Hope in the fact that Jesus is God's answer to me. He tells me that He is always with me! Even on the days that I feel all alone—He is with me! Our ultimate response should be to worship the God who is with us. He is not afraid of my brokenness. I am not so messy that the Master doesn't want to commune with me. He comes to me as the God who can and will be with me through the chaos of this fractured world.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, You alone are wise and good. Thank You for loving us enough to humble Yourself and identify with us. Thank You for being with us and giving us a path back to God through your sacrifice! Thank You for the truths that are contained in Your holy Word. Thank You that by Your grace You told the end from the beginning and sent Your Son to be born of a virgin and become the full and final atonement for our sin. Thank You that Jesus walked the earth as a Man, and understands the limitations of our humanity. Thank you that He helps us in our trials and temptations and we praise Your name that He is coming back one day, To finalize His authority over sin, the world and the devil. To Him be all the glory—Amen.

Contributed by Jen Ellis

God's Deliverance

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

Luke 2:4-5

David, a lowly shepherd, became an example of what it looks like for a sinful human to trust in God and have a relationship with Him. David wrote of his sorrows, praises, and songs through the book of Psalms and demonstrated to us how he relied on God in a faith-filled life. He wasn't perfect in his obedience, and his life wasn't always easy, but he constantly came back to God and trusted in His plan.

The goodness in David's heart could not deliver him from the sins of his past, nor save him from mistakes in his future. However, his faith in God as the deliverer to the fallen world was enough to find favor in God's eyes. David understood that God fulfilled promises. God promised David that his lineage would provide a way for the Savior of the world to come to earth and rescue all sinners. Here in Luke 2, we see the fulfillment of that promise when Joseph, born of David, faithfully traveled to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus.

Today, a faith-filled life bears similar reflection to that of David's. As modern-day children of Christ, we still praise, mourn, rejoice, and weep—and God still delivers us because He is good while we are faithful. Today may be a great day for you, or it may not, but what is most important is to remember that God delivers us and loves us. Since Christ fulfilled His promise of conquering sin on the cross, we rest assured that we too have been delivered.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for delivering me. Thank you for sending Your perfect Son to the earth to rescue us from the darkness of the world. I pray that when I struggle in my faith, that You would have mercy on me and remind me of Your goodness. I pray for obedience in telling others about the good news of Christ, so that they too may be delivered. Amen.

Contributed by Jonathan & Ellyn Ennis

BIG PRAYERS

But the angel said to him:

*“Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard.
Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John.”*

Luke 1:13

What Zechariah wanted seemed impossible. But he was a man of faith, so he asked God for it anyway.

“Lord,” he pleaded, “I know this is an awfully big prayer, especially since Elizabeth and I are some of the most seasoned adults (*from the June Mathews paraphrase*) at the temple. But could you please give us a child? Amen.” Now Zechariah knew that God was perfectly capable of granting that request. Even so, he was more than a little startled when an angel appeared and said, “Your prayer has been heard.”

Before they knew it, Elizabeth and Zechariah were up to their eyeballs in 2:00 a.m. feedings and dirty diapers, overwhelmed with the goodness of a God who saw fit to make them parents in their old age. And their child, a delightful little boy, grew up to pave the way for the Messiah. Not only did God answer Zechariah’s prayer, but He further honored the one who prayed it by making Zechariah the father of John the Baptist. As God often will, He responded to a big prayer in an awesome way.

Zechariah’s story reminds us that our prayers reveal what we believe about God. Little prayers attempt to squeeze the Creator of the Universe into a tiny human-size box. But big prayers like Zechariah’s demonstrate faith in a God with the unlimited power to respond in ways we can never imagine—If we’ll only ask.

Prayer

“Lord, Your Word tells me that nothing is impossible for You. Help me to trust You with my big prayers. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Contributed by June Mathews

Seek Godly Mentors

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

Mary had just received a message from the angel Gabriel that she had been chosen to be the mother of Christ, and that the conception would be the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. When she learned of her sacred responsibility, the angel Gabriel reassured her, “For with God nothing shall be impossible.” God did not just randomly choose Mary. She did not have any control over that. She did, however, have control over her obedience to the will of the Lord.

Mary’s faith allowed her to believe the news to be actual, but understandably, she was overwhelmed and afraid. Gabriel reassured Mary by sharing the news that her relative Elizabeth was also six months pregnant. How comforting this must have been for the young Mary!

Mary immediately sought out Elizabeth as a mentor because she knew her heart for the Lord and that she lived out the godly principles they had both been taught. Elizabeth had the Lord’s wisdom and, as a result, recognized Mary’s distress. Elizabeth had the experience that Mary lacked and, through her example, encouraged Mary to be strong in her faith. By seeking the counsel and mentorship of Elizabeth, Mary was able to recognize that with God, nothing is impossible and that His word will never fail!

God thought highly enough of Mary to choose her out of all the women on earth to carry His son. However, Mary recognized that she needed a mentor, not only for wisdom but also for encouragement and celebration. Mary was teachable and humble enough to know that she needed a godly mentor, and sought Elizabeth for guidance and counsel. We all need the comfort of godly mentors when we face uncertainties, fears, and even our greatest joys!

Prayer

“Lord, give me a heart of faith to believe in Your ability to do great things through me. Help me pursue Your wisdom with all my heart! I ask that You give me the discernment to seek godly counsel, and lead me to mentors with a heart for Christ. Help me to learn how to mentor others so that I may be used to glorify You! In Jesus’ precious name, Amen.”

God Looks At The Heart

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered.

“May your word to me be fulfilled.”

Then, the angel left her.

Luke 1.38

Mary. A common name. A common young girl. An uncommon response.

In Luke chapter 1, we find the account of the birth of both John the Baptist and Jesus the Messiah. Both birth announcements are held with an angel appearing to declare their coming. The two accounts are similar, yet the responses are quite different. Mary was approached by an angel with a message from God, and her response was anything but common. She was told her entire life would change. She would carry the Messiah and bring His life into the world. Mary was a young girl betrothed to Joseph. What would others think of her? What would *he* think? These are thoughts that fill my head as I try to imagine how I would respond. I can so easily get caught up in how the world would respond to this pregnancy. Yet, Mary carried herself in a posture of humility knowing God’s plan was best. She responded to this high calling on her life with deep trust and obedience. Her humble spirit is probably a reason God chose her to bring His Son into the world.

Only twenty verses earlier in this chapter, we find a response to God with a vastly different outcome. Zechariah, John’s father, responds in doubt to the angel when he is told that he will have a son. Zechariah was a priest chosen to burn incense to the Lord. You would think this religious leader would’ve had Mary’s response, but instead he questioned how it could be since he was of old age. As a result, he was muted until his son’s arrival.

How will you respond to God when he speaks to you? Will you respond with humility and choose to trust His will? Will your response be uncommon to the world yet pleasing to God?

Prayer

“Lord help us to respond to Your will in our lives in ways that glorify You. Help us to be faithful, hopeful, and uncommon as we look to You for hope and guidance this Christmas season. Amen.”

Contributed by Anna DeBell

Do What Is Right Not What Is Expected

But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."

Matthew 1:20

It's been said that the words "fear not" appear in the Bible 365 times. I haven't counted for myself, but being a student of the Bible for most of my life, that sounds reasonably accurate.

Fear is the most debilitating force in our lives. I personally believe on a daily basis fear is harder to fight than any of the vices we normally consider to be sinful.

Can you imagine the fear Joseph felt when he realized Mary was pregnant? Had it not been for an angel appearing to him in a dream, calling him out by name and telling him of the immaculate conception, we can assume Joseph probably would have followed through with his plans in Matthew 1:19. He would have quietly separated with Mary, the young love of his life.

Yet, just as God spoke to Joseph in that night of his fear, God speaks to us today. We have nothing to fear as Christians. Proverbs 28:1 says, "The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion."

God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). Let's receive today what God has given us, and not any fear that we have assumed by habit or outside influence.

Joseph's fear was allayed by the angel's sweet message, and it empowered Joseph to do the right thing. And then, God changed the course of history and of eternity.

It's your turn today to "fear not."

Prayer

"Lord, help me to find confidence in You. Help me not to fear, but to trust Your righteous, mighty, omnipotent hands for my life. Amen."

Contributed by Bill Todd

Do Not Be Afraid

*The angel said to him,
“I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God,
and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.”
Luke 1:19*

In Luke 1:12-19, the angel, Gabriel, was sent directly from God to deliver a message. Being in the presence of this angel that had just left the holy presence of God could cause fear—like being summoned to the principal’s or the boss’s office. But we know God has not given us this spirit of fear.

Gabriel brought a message of peace. The driving force of fear may be an idol we have constructed to reduce or replace God. Maybe that idol is the thought of losing our comfort, our relationships, our status? Fear lies to us. Believing lies builds evil strongholds. These strongholds keep us from the Truth.

Jesus identifies *Himself* as the Truth. The Truth is what dispels fear and tears down the idols. The Truth tells us to be strong and courageous. The Truth gives us courage to overcome the fear. It is Jesus, the Truth, Who has overcome the world and all the fear in it. It is to Jesus whom we are to surrender, not fear. Surrendering is following. Following is freedom—freedom to choose to put aside fear and pick up courage. Choosing courage does not mean we will always be safe; in fact, it may be dangerous. Yet, having the courage to follow Jesus will always be right. Right standing with Jesus is our ultimate goal.

Prayer

“Lord, give us the courage to accept the message of courage and peace that You deliver to us. Give us the courage to set aside any fear that keeps us from following the Truth.”

Contributed by Ginger Cornelius

Prepare Your Heart

*“And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”
Luke 1:17*

There are many times in life that we find ourselves preparing for something. Whether as a student you are preparing for an exam; or as an athlete you are preparing for the big game; or as a soon to be mom and dad, you are preparing for the birth of a child.

We often find ourselves in a season of preparation. When we come to Luke 1:17, we have just been introduced to John the Baptist who was to be born to Zechariah and Elizabeth. The Bible tells us that John the Baptist would have the awesome responsibility of preparing the way of the Lord by making ready the people for the coming Messiah. Amongst all the competing priorities you are preparing for this season...the gifts, the meals, the decorations, and the gatherings...my hope is that you will find time to read the Christmas story, pray, and worship with other believers. These are a few ways we can prepare our hearts for the true reason for the season.

Prayer

“Heavenly Father, we acknowledge during this season who You are and the love You have for us in sending Your son. Help us this Christmas season be a people and a church prepared to do Your work as we seek to point others to You. We pray this season would truly be an awakening for our souls as we consider the gift of Jesus. We celebrate His birth and are grateful for the salvation provided by His life, death, and resurrection. Prepare our hearts this season to understand the impact of the birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. It’s in His name, the matchless and powerful name of Jesus we pray, Amen.”

Contributed by Eric Dorr

Be Joyful

*When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb,
and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. -Luke 1:41*

This WOMB LEAPING moment represents one of the first fulfillments of the Word when Gabriel tells Zachariah that his son John the Baptist will be “a joy and delight” and be “filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born” (Luke 1:14-15). Because of this, John the Baptist hits the ground running with a passion for his mission to “go before the Lord and make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” (Luke 1:17)

The driving force of John the Baptist's ministry was the Holy Spirit. That same Holy Spirit that drove him passionately, is the same Holy Spirit trying to passionately guide us and lead us in our everyday walk. As we remember Jesus's birth, we should be filled with “joy and delight” as it is our job to continue to “ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Imagine the excitement when John literally leaped in his mother's womb as Jesus came near to him while in *His* mother's womb, resulting in the Holy Spirit entering John. That should be *our* level of excitement with Jesus to where just the thought of anything close to Jesus jolts us to leap into action, filling our daily life with steps guided by the Holy Spirit.

We should reflect daily on the question of, “Does my life look like a Holy Spirit-jolted life? Is it filled with joy and love, leaping to spread to others the reality that Jesus is real and came to free us from our burdens? Or was I part of the negative gossip, the negative rhetoric, or the hate-filled speech of today?” During this festive period, let's WOMB LEAP and start a new chapter of spreading joy and love more than ever.

Prayer

“Heavenly Father, I thank you for grace to give me a new chance everyday to represent Your kingdom. Help me today to remember the joy I had when I first met you and leaped for joy knowing You sent Your son to die for me. Help me let the Holy Spirit lead my life, and give me passion like John the Baptist to spread Your love and joy to those in my workplace, friend group, and family. Give me strength to stand up for what I know is right, and to seek to fill my mind and heart with things that glorify You. For in Jesus name, I pray..... Amen.”

Contributed by Jimmy Wambua

God Can Use Anyone To Fulfill His Purposes

*In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.
Luke 2:1*

Over 2,000 years ago, Caesar Augustus organized his empire by issuing a decree that a census be taken. Little did he know that God was using him to help set events in motion leading to such humble beginnings for our Savior to be born in a manger. What is most amazing is how God used an unbelieving ruler like Caesar Augustus to fulfill His purpose.

Just as Caesar Augustus was organizing his empire long ago, today we make every effort to maintain our lives in a neat, orderly bundle. Especially during this busy, hectic time of year, we are frantically keeping ourselves organized and ready for the season's happenings! Our list of activities and to-do's are endless: Gifts to buy, meals to plan and prepare, travel to coordinate, and family and friends to host or visit...and the list goes on!

We can all get a bit distracted with all we have going on. Let's take a moment today to re-orient our focus back to Jesus. He tasks us to be organized and ready for His glorious return by remaining in Him. And when we do, we see clearly how He uses our humble abilities to fulfill His purposes!

Prayer

"Lord, thank you for the many blessings in my life. During this special season of the year, help me not be distracted and remain in You. Help me to be ready and to see more clearly the beautiful, perfect path You have laid before me. I offer myself in worship to You."

Contributed by Phil DeSimone

Jesus Is All We Need

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

Luke 2:4-5

"Great is Thy faithfulness, oh God my father: there is no shadow of turning with Thee: Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not: all Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be." These words published almost 100 years ago penned by Thomas Chisholm shout to my heart God's immutable and steadfast character. God never changes. He is steadfast and keeps His promises.

These enduring promises are illustrated in the lives of Joseph and Mary in Luke 2:4-5 through the fulfillment of prophecy. They had traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem because of a decree issued by Caesar Augustus to take a census of all the people of whom he ruled. Our steadfast God was setting the stage. The angel Gabriel first spoke to Mary, then to Joseph to reveal the long-anticipated promise to bring a new King from the line of David (2 Samuel 7). Gabriel spoke of a son who would be called Jesus (which means "Yahweh Saves") who would save His people from their sins and sit on the throne of David forever (Luke 1:30-33, Matthew 1:20-21).

In Micah 5:2 we see the city of Bethlehem (the "city of David") proclaimed as a city of blessing from which the Messiah would come. This was the home of David's family and where the young shepherd boy was called and anointed as King of Israel by the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 16). Joseph, himself a descendant of King David is called back to this "city of David," Bethlehem.

We are also called to reflect this steadfastness. In what ways are you showing you trust the Lord to take care of you? May we trust Him to keep His promises and faithfully join the Psalmist to proclaim, "I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

Prayer

"God You are steadfast in all Your ways. I pray my faith in action reflects the steadfastness of Your character. I trust You to fulfill all that You have said because of who You are, and because of Your past faithfulness. You are working all things for my good. Turn my heart to worship You, and to live in spirit and truth."

Contributed by Becky Rogers

Serve Others

...and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Luke 2:7

When you hear the word “King”, what do you think of?

You probably thought of someone powerful, or a military leader, or maybe even royalty? If I had to guess, the word “infant” wasn’t among the words that came to your mind.

If there was ever a time for The Lord to show off His power and glory, it would have been the birth of His son, Jesus. This epic event could have been a huge, elaborate, grand entrance into the world, but no. He came as a small, defenseless, infant. But not only that, there was no room for Mary and Joseph to stay in the inn.

The Savior of the world was born, wrapped in cloths, and laid in a manger. Can you imagine placing your sweet little baby into an animals’ feeding trough? I can’t imagine. This shows us the beauty of the life of Christ. The King of Kings, born into a poor and ordinary family. He was brought into this world not to rule as a dominating figure; but to save the poor, the ordinary, the rich, the powerless...you, me, and everyone who would respond. This Christmas season, I am thankful to have a God who offers grace and mercy to ALL who believe in Him!

Prayer

“Lord, thank You for the birth of Jesus! Thank you for the manger, and the ordinary lifestyle You chose for Your Son. I pray You change our hearts to be more accepting and gracious towards others, just as Jesus was on earth. In Your name I pray, Amen.”

Contributed by Kaley Cochran

God Loves You

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord."

Luke 2:10-11

Why does the birth of a child bring so much joy and excitement? After all, that newborn is going to require almost constant work and supervision. Feeding, diaper changing, countless hours in the rocking chair, sleepless nights—it's all part of caring for a baby. Yet nothing brings a family more happiness and delight than a new infant. It doesn't seem to make sense.

Could it be that when we gaze into that baby's eyes, we catch a glimpse of God Himself? That we sense we are in the presence of a miracle that only our great and powerful Savior can create? That we hold in our arms a part of His plan for the world to continue?

Instinctively, our love for this child pours out of us, like water bursting through a dam. We will change our lives, make any adjustment, any sacrifice, for its health and safety. And we will feel happy and blessed to do so, because the life of that child is a constant reinforcement that God is real, that He is in charge, that He has a plan, and that we are an important part of it.

Imagine the excitement of the shepherds when they were told of the birth of a baby that not only indicated God, but actually was God!

Prayer

"Heavenly Father, thank You for the birth of Your Son, the ultimate proof of Your existence and Your unconditional love for us."

Contributed by Ken Lass

Adore Jesus And Tell Others About Him

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. Luke 2:15-20

It's easy to adore. In fact to most of us, it's second nature.

Don't believe me? Go to Facebook or Instagram today and scroll through the posts. You'll find an endless sea of photos and heart-felt sentiments about kids, grandchildren, friendships and football teams...not to mention vacation destinations and meals.

Or, just come to our house. We recently adopted a puppy. She's cute, but that little thing does not contribute a solitary thing to our household. She hasn't loaded the dishwasher, trimmed a hedge, or offered to spring for a tank of gas, yet we all adore her. We roll on the floor with her like goofballs, talk to her in weird voices, and present her with toys to chew on and destroy. Why? Because we tend to adore the people or things that have a positive impact on our lives.

Consider the shepherds on that first Christmas Eve. Five minutes before the angel showed up, these roughnecks on a hillside in the dead of night had no idea what "a Jesus" was. But five seconds after the angel gave the news, they dropped everything to go find Him. Sight unseen, this baby had impacted their lives, and they had no choice in their hearts but to push pause and demonstrate their feelings for Him in person.

This Christmas, may we at some point find time to drop everything, push pause, and adore Him. Far greater than anything that impacts us here, He is God, and He truly deserves our worship!

Prayer

"Lord, thank You for coming. We needed You far more than we understand, and You came. May You forevermore be praised, worshiped, and adored, because You alone are worthy."

Contributed by Chad Summers

Walk In The Light

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!”

Luke 2:13-14

It's been a hard year.

Some of us are in desperate need of peace, respite and assurance. In the above verses those needs are met. So are we missing it? In verse eleven an angel makes a grand announcement to the shepherds. In verse thirteen we see an army of angels celebrating glory and peace.

Peace is the implication of the announcement of Jesus being born. This announcement took one angel yet the implication of this announcement deserved an *army* of angels. The outcome of this declaration means that glory will ascend while He simultaneously provides peace to descend onto His people.

That's the whole point—for Him to be glorified while you receive peace. So then, let's get hung up on the “with whom He is well pleased.” The invitation of peace to men is a universal invitation for peace. We know that not everyone will accept this invitation, but if you want peace to rule, you have to first accept the Peacemaker.

Prayer

“Prince of Peace, please clearly reveal to us how to walk in Your light to access the peace You offer. We desperately want to glorify You with our lives. Be our strength and equip us to be Your ambassadors. Amen.”

Contributed by Megan Smith

Seek God And Hear From Him

*Simeon took Him in his arms and praised God, saying:
“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen Your salvation.”*

Luke 2:28-30

Simeon listened and knew that he would see the Messiah before his time on earth had ended. So when the baby Jesus was placed in his arms, he knew he was holding the Savior.

What awe Simeon must have felt to be able to hold the Christ child! I can imagine how everything around him must have faded into the background when he focused on Jesus. I can imagine the peace he must have felt in knowing that he was looking at the Savior! What joy must have filled his heart!

If I had that opportunity to hold this child, would I have been still enough to know who I held in my arms? Would I have heard the quiet voice of the Lord telling me to just focus on Him? Telling me that what I have is the Savior who loves me like no other? Would I have heard the quiet voice of the Lord telling me to put every distraction aside and just listen?

Simeon had been waiting to see the One who would be called the Messiah. When he held Him, he knew that this child was the promised One. He was content with that knowledge. He needed nothing more.

We have that knowledge. The knowledge that Christ is the Savior and that He loves us. It is my prayer that we recognize the voice of God, no matter how quietly He speaks. I pray that we put aside the everyday distractions this Christmas to listen to Him.

Prayer

“Dear Lord, thank You for the blessing that Christmas is to me. I ask that you help me to put aside the distractions and listen. I pray that my focus is where it needs to be and that I am able to honor You in the things that I do this season and throughout the new year. Amen.”

Contributed by Kimberly Felts

Waiting On God Is Worth It

There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

Luke 2:36-37

It's hard to be steady and wait in our world today. We love having everything instantaneously. We like our food quick, our lines short, our news immediately, and our tv on demand. Waiting is not something that we find comfortable. It requires tolerance of an unknown situation. It requires self-control to wait on God. It requires patience.

We usually find ourselves waiting only when we *have* to. We tend to take matters into our own hands. We may try to "speed up the process" or force a solution on our own. In our season of waiting, we often forget that God's timing is perfect. His timing is never too early or too late.

Anna shows us what it's like to be patient. We should wait with hope (Romans 8:25) while worshiping and praying each day. Anna likely remained single after she was widowed seven years after marriage. She spent her life in a continual season of worship, fasting and praying. When she patiently waited with hope, she was rewarded by an encounter with the Christ child!

Displaying patience in life is a process. The Bible teaches us that the patience is produced from the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), comes from trusting God (Psalm 37:7-9), and produces a heart of thankfulness (Romans 5:2). Sometimes God wants to teach us to slow down and trust Him.

God extends his patience with us continually by pursuing us and forgiving us in our sinful state. His patient love and forgiveness opens the door for a relationship with Him. Let us be grateful for God's patient relationship with us this Christmas season!

Prayer

"Dear Father, teach me to be more patient as I wait for Your perfect timing in my life. Fill my heart with hope and thankfulness. Thank You for Your patience with me! Help me to slow down and trust You. In Christ Jesus' name we pray, Amen."

Practice Being Content

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

Matthew 2:3-4

Herod the King, also known as *Herod The Great*, ruled Israel and Judah from 37-4 BC. Since Rome had appointed him “King of the Jews,” he was naturally troubled when news reached him regarding a newborn baby labeled as “King of the Jews” by the Magi. Men like Herod didn’t take the challenge of being dethroned particularly well, and just the rumor of a newborn baby with a label of *king* was challenge enough, not to mention an insult to this sitting ruler.

This is where we see pure evil step in. What I find interesting is that he never challenged that this baby could be king. Even as a baby, Jesus posed a threat to the world. You see, Jesus poses a real problem for people today who are like Herod. Those who have everything seem to seek more, and never stop to inquire as to why they are not content. For someone who *should* be content, why is this happen?

Those who struggle with contentment simply do not know what to do with Jesus. They often see Jesus as a threat to their kingdom, their lifestyle, their control...just like Herod. Is this you?

Many today have a real problem with authority, again like Herod. There was no way there could be two “King of the Jews.” Little did Herod know that this baby, this KING the wise men were seeking was entering the world to save people just like him. Herod missed that fact. May we lead others to not do the same.

Prayer

“Lord Jesus, thank You for leaving Your throne to humbly put on flesh and enter a sinful world to reconcile the lost. Your sacrifice can never be repaid or repeated. Thank You for defeating hell, death and the grave. Thank You for coming anyway despite knowing how You would ultimately be sacrificed for our transgressions. Thank You, my King. In Jesus’ name. Amen!”

Contributed by Frankie Crumb

When God Leads We Follow

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

Matthew 2: 9-10

Jesus entered a world where the wisest of the wise looked up to see a star shining brighter and with more purpose than any others. The star said, "He's here! Come!" And so they did.

Those men of faith had no map, trail or electronic voice to confirm their destination. All they had were expectant hearts and certainty in God's faithfulness. They had long been looking for a sign, and there it was. Follow the star, find your Savior.

Today, we Christians have also journeyed in faith to find Him, and Jesus has come into our lives as surely as He came into that stable beneath the star. So now we carry Bethlehem in our hearts. Because He lives in us, we can choose to let His presence shine bright in all we think, say and do. What a gift we've been given, what a gift we have to give!

Christmas has become so many things to so many people. But for the Christ follower, it is mostly an opportunity. Yes, we wonder again at the miraculous birth of our Hope. We acknowledge Him, reverence and celebrate Him. But there is so much more. In all our following, may we also lead. Lead others to the grace, forgiveness and reality of a loving Savior.

The discouraged, the angry, the hurting, the lonely, the forgotten. He came for them as surely as He came for us. And because He loved us, even when we were hopeless and alone, we love Him best by gently and purposefully leading those who need Him, to Him.

Follow the star to Jesus.

Prayer

"Oh Lord Jesus, we have seen a great light shining in our darkness, and it is You! May we never lose the wonder of Your coming, and may we ever share Your light with those still lost in the dark!"

Contributed by Carol Garrett

Be Generous

On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 2:11

GIFTS

Tradition required that those granted access to royalty would present gifts. The Magi opened up their treasures and presented Christ with royal gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold for the King. Frankincense for the Lamb of God without blemish. Myrrh for the Redeemer who would suffer and die an atoning death in our place. What were Mary's thoughts as the prophetic and useful gifts were given to Christ? Maybe she thought of Gabriel's words, "...and His kingdom will never end." Did she remember the visit by the shepherds who heard, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord."

Mary certainly remembered Simeon in the temple prophesying, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." The gift of Christ is worthy of all glory and honor.

GENEROSITY

Here's a word from a church planter: "Generosity is an invitation for God to infuse blessing into your lives."

Prayer

2 Corinthians 9:15 "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"

"Thank You, Father for giving us the indescribable (perfect) gift of Christ. In return, give us the strength to share the good news of Christ and bring glory to God as we enjoy Him forever! Amen."

Contributed by Hugh & Kelly McMurry

Jesus Is The KING Of Kings

On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 2:11

Gold has always carried significant meaning and value. We learn through this passage that the Magi brought gold to Jesus. It is said that gold was worth even more in Jesus' time than it is today. The gift of gold in Biblical times was used to honor a king. The Magi quickly knew that this was no ordinary baby, but rather He was the "King of Kings and the "Lord of Lords."

These wisemen brought their most valuable possession and laid it before King Jesus. They wanted to honor God with what they had. Honor is defined as *regarding with great respect*. Honoring comes from the respect that you have for an individual. How have you honored Jesus lately in your personal life?

We can rest assured that Jesus is the perfect king who deserves all honor, glory, and praise. His throne is built on righteousness, justice, love, and peace, and His Kingdom never ends.

Have you honored anyone in your life recently? Reach out to a person that you hold in high regard and encourage them today. Let them know that you are praying for them, and are thankful for the example they have set forth.

Prayer

"Heavenly Father, help us to honor You with what we have. More than an offering we give You, make our lives an offering to You. Amen."

Contributed by Spencer Jones

Jesus Is Our Great High Priest

On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 2:11

Frankincense is the second gift that the wise men brought to Jesus. Like the first gift of gold, frankincense was very expensive and acted as a type of perfume during Jesus' time. It was used by priests who would burn incense in worship to God. If the gift of gold symbolically pointed to Jesus as King, then frankincense symbolically pointed to Jesus as our Great High Priest.

The high priests of Judaism would first offer a sacrifice for their own sins before interceding on behalf of the people of Israel before God. But this was not so with Jesus as our Great High Priest. Jesus was tempted in every way that we are, yet was without sin. He did not offer a sacrifice for His own sins before interceding for us, but instead He offered Himself up as the perfect, once-and-for-all sacrifice for our sins. So what is our response to this? Hebrews tells us that we can now draw near to God's throne of grace with boldness and confidence, because what awaits us is a God of grace and mercy.

If we are honest, as much as we try to be perfect we are often reminded that we fall short. This reality does not cause God to move away from us, but rather God moves towards us in Christ. We don't have a distant high priest, lacking understanding of our situation, but one who is sympathetic to us, and moved by compassion for us in our time of need.

So in this Christmas season, what do you—like the wise men—need to bring to the Lord? A gift we can lay before our Great King and High Priest is the incense of a life surrendered fully to Him. Because of Jesus, we know that we can draw near to the Father and be honest with where we are, confessing our inability to attain perfection and leaning into the gracious and merciful arms of our Great High Priest, Jesus.

Prayer

"Heavenly Father, thank You for being our Great High Priest, knowing us fully and moving toward us with love and compassion. We love You. Amen."

Contributed by Matt Dickey

Carry One Another's Burdens

On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 2:11

For the fourth straight day our focus is Matthew 2:11. You might be thinking, "Seriously, how come we are looking at the same verse again." Unfortunately, we often come to the Bible in a hurry to check off the box that we *read the Bible today*. We need to learn to slow down and think deep on and ponder Scripture so that it penetrates our soul. We need to sacrifice our time so that we can let God speak to us.

The Magi made a sacrificial journey to follow the star to see the King. Their sacrifice included time. The journey cost them money. The journey required them to spend their energy.

The gifts that they brought were not cheap. Our focus on this day is the gift of myrrh. This was used as an ingredient in perfume and deodorant. Also, it was used in the embalming process (See John 19:39).

The costly myrrh given by the Magi pointed to the future, sacrificial gift of Jesus laying down His life for you. Jesus paid a debt so that He could rescue you from your sin and restore you to a right relationship with Him.

During this Christmas season, spend some time thanking Jesus for His sacrifice. Think of ways that you can sacrifice.

Prayer

"Heavenly Father, thank You for Your sacrifice for me. Help me to carry others' burdens sacrificially, and lead me in making sacrifices for You, and other people. Amen."

Contributed by Jeff Gardner

God Is Our True Refuge

*When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.
“Get up,” he said, “take the child and His mother and escape to Egypt.
Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill Him.”
Matthew 2:13*

Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night and left for Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod.

Egypt? A picture of the world, but also where the nation of Israel was enslaved for 400 years. Yet God used Egypt as a place of refuge away from the murderous Herod, until Joseph had another dream: “Arise, take the young child and His mother and go to the land of Israel.” This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called My Son.”

Just as God redeemed a nation out of slavery, Jesus redeemed a people. Herod sought to destroy this child, the Christ, our Savior who partook of flesh and blood that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is the devil, and might free those who through the fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

Prayer

“Lord, may I hear Your still small voice in the midst of life’s struggle. You are in the details of my life. Take hold of my hand, and do not let go that I may know that I have been touched by Your grace. Grant it, O Lord my refuge and strength.”

Contributed by Denise Dockery

Jesus Understands Our Circumstances

*...and He went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that He would be called a Nazarene.
Matthew 2:23*

The old saying “before you judge a man, walk a mile in his shoes” expresses the idea that understanding how others see situations should guide our relationship with them. Someone who has never waited tables in a restaurant should be the last one to criticize the service received.

Jesus chose to live like one of us, to walk a mile in our shoes as He was raised in Nazareth. Take some time to imagine a little boy, then a teenager, and then a young adult living a normal life in the streets of Nazareth. Over the years He would have encountered both good and bad experiences with the people He met. Since He lived without sin, we can correctly assume that He related to others in ways best for them.

He demonstrated an understanding heart. Whatever circumstance we face, Jesus understands. He understands the fear, the anger, the frustration and all others experiences because He understands us completely and loves us unconditionally. As His children, our response to His gift of understanding is twofold. First, with joy and thanksgiving we can trust Him to walk with us through every circumstance we face. He doesn't remain at a distance judging us for how we should be handling things. Second, we can follow His example as we relate to other people.

Though understanding may not be our natural response, we can grow in that trait by practice. By walking with others through difficult times and sincerely communicating our desire to understand how they see things, we grow more like Jesus. Whose shoes do you need to wear today?

Prayer

“Jesus, help us know and trust You to understand everything we face today. Give us hearts to understand the people we meet. Forgive us for the times we have placed our feelings and wants before the needs of others. Make us more like you today.”

Contributed by Roger Crew

What God Is Teaching Me This Advent Season:

This Christmas At First Baptist!

Lottie Moon Christmas Offering

Taking the Gospel around the world!
Our 2021 Goal: \$190,000

SAM Christmas Banquet

Sunday, December 12 - 12:15 & 4:15pm
In the Gym, with comedian Tim Lovelace

Preschool Parents Night Out

Friday, December 3 - 6:00-8:30pm
A night in for babies-K5 and their
1st-5th grade siblings

"Here With Us"

Sunday, December 19 - 9:15 & 10:45am
Presented by the Ministry of Praise
Choir & Orchestra

"Behind the Manger Scenes"

Sunday, December 5 - 6:00pm
Presented by the Ministry of Praise
Children's Choir

Candlelight Services

Sunday, December 19 - 5:00pm
Friday, December 24 - 3:00 & 5:00pm
All the wonder and worship of
Christmas, by candlelight!

Family Christmas Festival

Saturday, December 11 - 4:00-6:00pm
Photo booths, a live camel, Christmas
treats and crafts, train ride, and Santa!

One Worship

Sunday, December 26 - 10:00am
Small groups will not meet on this day.



First Baptist
Church

Trussville