

ADVENT



By
Wayne J. Edwards, Pastor



With Grateful Appreciation

In 1978, my heart was captured with the Christmas musical "The King of Love." When I presented it to the youth/college choir as a possible cantata, the consensus was that it was too difficult. However, after listening to it several times, the life-changing truth of the message became more important than the challenge of the music, and the rehearsals began. Now, 45 years later, I'm convinced that most of those in that choir could sing every song by memory.

With permission from the Jubilate Music Group, we have included the words from a few of the songs in this wonderful musical in this year's Advent study. However, to get the full impact, I urge each family to order a CD to use with their daily devotions. Rodger Strader's beautiful writing and Bob Krogstad's inspirational musical arrangements will grab your heart and draw your devotion to the Lord Jesus, the King of love. *Wayne J. Edwards*

*The King of Love, The Christ of Christmas
He came that holy night so long ago.
The King of Love what a wonderful story,
How He from heaven came to earth below.
It was His love that brought Him down,
For us, He was to suffer loss;
A ring of thorns will be His crown,
His kingly throne a cruel cross.*

© 1978 by Triad Music, Inc. All rights reserved

King of Love (jubilatemusic.com)

To order: <https://jubilatemusic.com/collections/cantatas-collections/products/king-of-love> - Choose Listening CD - 00-LGLC00301 - \$ 16.99 USD



Advent is a season of waiting, expecting, and hoping. The word “advent” comes from the Latin word “adventus,” which means “coming”. For Christians, celebrating Advent helps to prepare our hearts for the celebration of the “coming” of Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. The Advent Season begins the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day, which starts this year on December 3.

While the focus of Advent is upon the birth of Jesus Christ and the reality of His first coming, the actions and events used in celebrating our Lord’s birth also remind us and assure us of His promise to return. However, His second coming will not be as a baby boy with no place to lay His head, but as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, having been crowned by God the Father with all glory, honor, and praise. Every true believer lives each day in the glorious expectation of that second “advent” of our Lord.

Advent is also a spiritual journey for every believer. This year, we will walk, almost verse by verse, through the first two chapters of the Gospel of Matthew under the heading: **Behold the King!** These daily readings will also coordinate with the Sunday sermons for the next four weeks so that the Holy Spirit can saturate our minds with the truth of God’s Word.



The Advent wreath is a wonderful tool to help parents tell the real Christmas story to their children. The wreath is an evergreen circle with five candles, four around the wreath and one in the center. (Some use battery-operated colored lights.)

The circle of the wreath reminds us of God's eternity – He has no beginning or end. The green of the wreath speaks of the hope that we have in God, the hope of everlasting life.

Candles symbolize the light of God coming into the world through the birth of His Son. The four outer candles represent the waiting period during the four Sundays of Advent, which symbolize **the four centuries of waiting between the prophet Malachi and the birth of Christ.**

- **The Prophecy Candle** – (purple) **the candle of hope** – Romans 15:12-13
- **The Bethlehem Candle** – (purple) **the candle of peace** – Luke 3:4-6
- **The Shepherd Candle** – (pink) **the candle of Joy** – Luke 2:7-15
- **The Angel Candle** – (purple) **the candle of love** – John 3:16-17
- **The fifth candle is the Christ Candle** – (white) – John 1:29

As the candles are lit over the four weeks, they symbolize the demonic darkness of fear, the utter hopelessness of this world, and the guilt and remorse for our sins receding to the degree that the Light of the Word can shine through us. The flame of each new candle reminds us that something is happening; God is at work, and more is yet to come.

As we see our world drowning in chaos and confusion, and with wickedness and evil unashamedly manifested before us, let us begin this advent season with a sense of repentance and contrition for the unconfessed sins in our own heart and then for God's people around the world, that believers would renew their love for the Lord Jesus, and unbelievers would see their need of a Savior; the One whose birth even they will celebrate, albeit in selfishness.



This is an Advent symbol of Jesus from Rev 1:8 and 22:13: "I am the Alpha and the Omega [the first and the last, the beginning and the end],' says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (see also Isaiah 44:6).

The blue letter is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, Aleph, and the purple is the last letter of the Greek alphabet, Omega. Not only does this symbolize the One who has come and will come again, it also emphasizes the continuity of God's work in history throughout both the Old and New Testaments.



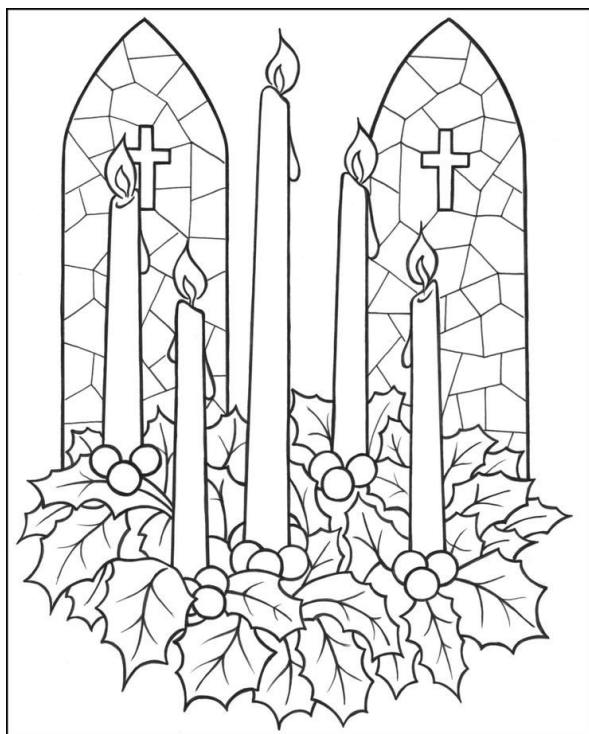
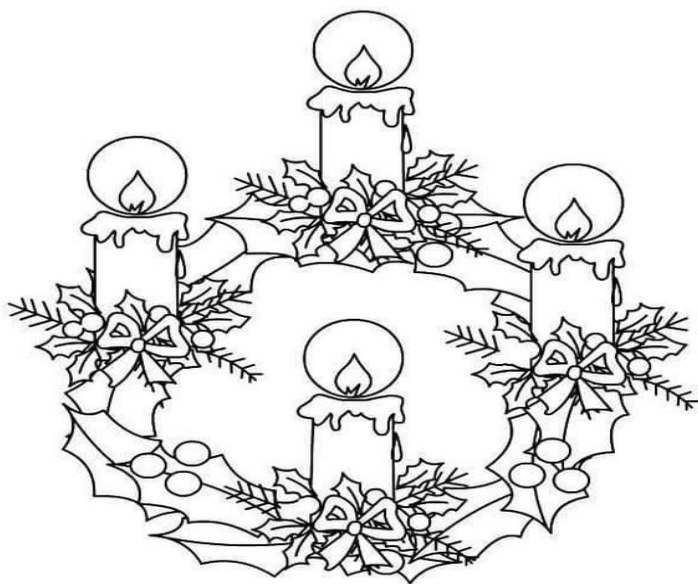
The Advent wreath can be as simple or as ornate as you want it to be. Remember, it is only a TOOL to use to tell the story – event by event.

Basically, all that is needed is a wreath of greenery, pine, cedar, holly, magnolia leaves, etc., or some use a vine that can be formed into a circle. Take five simple candle holders – four on the outside of the circle, and one on the inside. Insert four purple candles, one pink candle on the outside, and one white candle on the inside of the circle.

Here are some other ideas.



Advent wreath kits are available at all major craft stores, but I would encourage each family to BUILD their own with what they have around their home, or from a trip to the woods. For smaller kids, styrafoam and battery operaed lights can be used.





First Sunday in Advent

The Lighting of The Prophecy Candle – (purple) the candle of hope – Read Romans 15:12-13

As we begin the Christmas season, we must review the Old Testament prophecies that foretold the coming of a Savior. In Matthew 1:22-23, the gospel writer said, *“Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”*

Matthew quoted a specific prophecy from Isaiah that was declared more than 700 years earlier. In Isaiah 7:14, God spoke through His prophet: *“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”*

Mary did conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit, and she did bear a Son whom she named Immanuel. This one event should assure us that whatever God has said, He will do, and as the Great **“I AM”** He has the power to do, even if that means a virgin girl would need to conceive and give birth to a Son.

Prophecy is not the “foretelling” of the future but the “forth-telling” of what God has already ordained to be.

As we light the prophecy candle, may we allow the flame to enlighten our understanding of God's Word regarding the prophecies that have already been fulfilled and warm our hearts regarding the prophecies yet to be fulfilled, including the imminent return of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

- Read Psalm 80:1-7
- Read Isaiah 40:1-11
- Read Revelation 7:9-17

Like God's people before the first coming of Christ, we now look ahead to the time when Christ, our Lamb, and our Shepherd, will finish His work of redemption, and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

A Prayer of Hope

"Dear God, as we light this candle, we hope for your coming as our Good Shepherd. Please gather us in your arms, feed us with spiritual food, wipe away every tear from our eyes, and let Your face shine on us, so we may be saved. Come, our Shepherd! Amen."

*Hail, thou who art highly favored,
The Lord is with thee, the Lord is with thee:
Blessed art thou among women.
Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God.
And behold, thou shalt conceive and bring forth a son.
Thou shalt call His name – Jesus!*



First Monday in Advent

Introduction to Matthew's Gospel – Behold the King

Read Matthew 1:1

The four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are the only indisputable records of the birth, life, ministry, and message of Jesus Christ as the Savior sent from God. The first of the four, Matthew, was written by a man who was also known as Levi, a former tax collector who left all he had to follow Christ because of his personal faith in Him and who used his influence to tell others in his echelon of friends that Jesus was the Messiah they had longed for.

Written well before the Temple was destroyed in AD 70, Matthew's gospel is primarily for a Jewish audience to show them how Jesus Christ is the King and Messiah of Israel. While Luke wrote his account of the life of Christ to show Christ as the Redeemer, tracing the lineage of Jesus back to Adam, Matthew wrote to prove Jesus Christ as the rightful heir to the throne of David, and he traces his lineage back to Abraham.

Matthew quotes more than 60 Old Testament prophecies and shows how Jesus Christ fulfilled every one of them. He constantly refers to Jesus as the "Son of David," the "son of Abraham," and the future "Kingdom of Heaven" where the Messiah will reign.

There is a lot of interest today in genealogy, finding our biological roots. I've always wondered if I am from the stock of the great reformed preacher Jonathan Edwards, who played a critical role in the First Great Awakening in America in the early 1700s. One thing is for sure: we are in total agreement on our understanding of the nature of Christ and the essential doctrines of the Christian Faith.

You can trace your roots to see where you came from. Ancestry.com has a "free side" that will allow you to go so far, and then you must pay to get the rest. But if you have a few extra dollars, it may be worth it. Finding our heritage can be helpful to our understanding of who we are and why we are the way we are. But, as we will see, even in Jesus' lineage, there may be some surprises!

Matthew did not begin his gospel with Jesus' genealogy to satisfy man's curiosity about who He was or to give His followers a reason to boast in His ancestors. Matthew traced the roots of Jesus to prove He was and is Who He said He was: the Messiah – the "seed of promise" to Eve, the promise God gave to Abraham – *the promise of blessing*, and the promise God gave to David – *the promise of eternal government*.

No matter what we might find in our genealogy that we wished we hadn't, or about which we may choose to keep quiet, the one thing we need to SHOUT about is, by being "in Christ," we now have become "joint heirs with Jesus." We are in line to receive everything God promised to those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

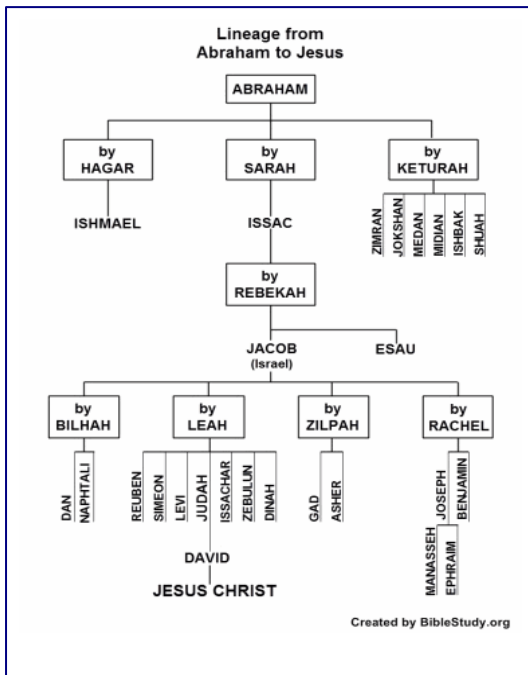


First Tuesday in Advent

Read Matthew 1:1-6

Okay, let's get this genealogy stuff behind us, and get on with the real Christmas story.

Not so fast!! Jesus' genealogy is where the Christmas story begins, for had Jesus not been in the lineage of Abraham and David, His birth, His life, His ministry, His message, His death – even His resurrection would not have been sufficient for our salvation. In other words, the “story” would have been just that – a “story!” Maybe this chart of the first 13 generations will help.



As you trace the lineage from Abraham to Jesus, notice the “Messianic Line” runs from Abraham, through his wife Sarah to Isaac, through his wife Rebekah to Jacob, and then it gets very interesting. While God allowed Jacob to have four wives, it was through Leah that Judah was born, who fathered Perez, Herzon, Ram, Amminadab, Nashon, Salmon, Boaz, Obed, and then Jesse, the father of David, the 13 generations from Abraham. Tomorrow, we will look at the generations from David to Jesus.

The genealogy of Jesus illustrates God’s sovereignty in protecting the “bloodline of the seed” through the many generations, but it also demonstrates God’s mercy. If you notice, there are four women listed in this genealogy.

- **Tamar** – Vs. 3 – a seducer and adulteress whom God saved from death.
- **Rahab** – Vs. 5 – a Gentile, rejected by the Jews and a prostitute, but was saved from judgment because of her expressed faith in the God of Israel.
- **Ruth** – Vs. 5 – a woman from a nation that was hated by the Jews but who still “chose” to be associated with God and His people.
- **Bathsheba** – Vs. 6 – who committed adultery with David, but sought and received God’s forgiveness.

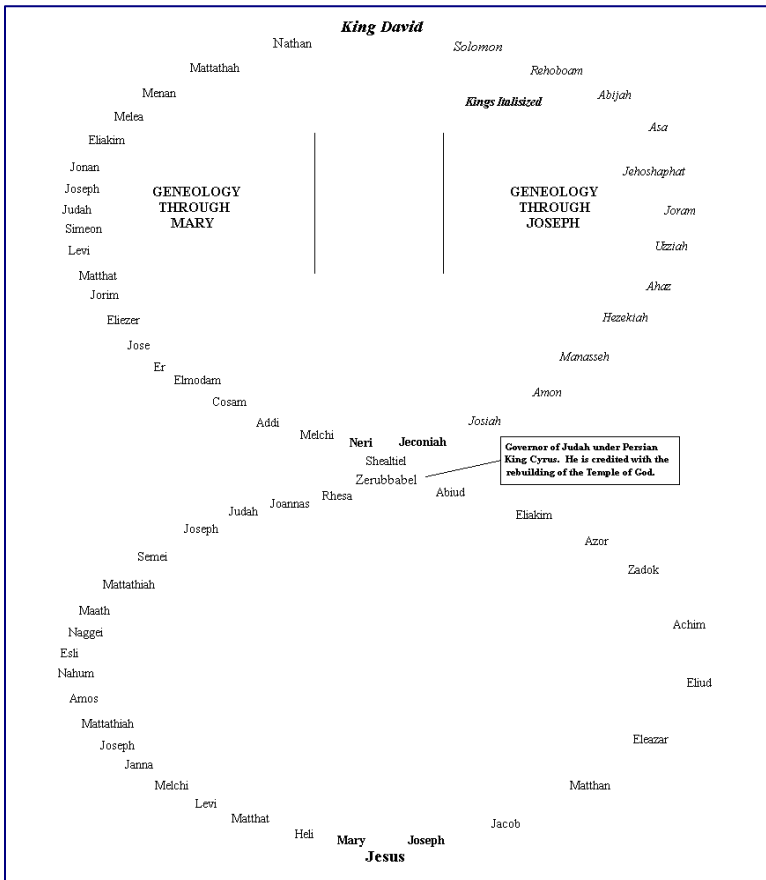
The fact that these four women are in the recorded genealogy of Jesus proves, “**no pit of sin is so deep that God’s love is not deeper still.**” God will extend His mercy and His grace upon anyone who will receive it. Like the rest of us, these four women sinned, and sinned greatly, but they were also forgiven and forgiven eternally. We will hear their testimonies in heaven soon.



First Wednesday in Advent

Read Matthew 1:7-17

Today we continue with the genealogy of Jesus from David as we follow the “kingly line”. This chart will be helpful.



The genealogy of Jesus demonstrates that God’s grace is not inherited but rather “given” as He wills. For example, there

are good and bad kings in the ancestry of Christ. Just because one king was good, meaning faithful and obedient to God, and honorable in his dealings with God's people, did not mean the next king would be the same way. The good kings were Solomon, Asa, and Jehoshaphat. The wicked kings were Rehoboam, Abijay, and Jehoram. You will find their history in 1st and 2nd Kings and 1st and 2nd Chronicles.

The genealogy of Jesus also demonstrates God's power to keep His promises, even if He must discipline His own people to accomplish them. Because of their wickedness and disobedience, God allowed His people to be taken captive in Babylon for 70 years. By all measures, the Jews should have forgotten their identity as they acclimated themselves to their captive nations. Not so with Israel. Matthew is showing his readers how God preserved the Jews through every attempt by Satan to stamp them out to preserve the seed line of the Messiah.


Even as we see the nations rising against Israel today, let us not be disturbed. For just as God preserved the Jews to fulfill His promise to send the Messiah the first time, we can rest assured Jesus will also keep His promise to His people to come again. The world can be overcome with despair, depression, discouragement, and defeat. But the Apostle John said, *"Who is he that overcomes the world, but he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God."* (1 John 5:4-5)




First Thursday in Advent

Read Matthew 1:16-17

We end our study of the genealogy of Jesus with three critically important truths.

 In verse 16, Matthew went to great lengths to ensure his readers understood, while Jesus was born to Mary, her husband, Joseph was not Jesus' father. Jesus was not born of man but of the Holy Spirit. He was the God-man – fully God and fully man, so that, while as man, He could have sinned, as God, He also had the capacity not to sin.

Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we are today, **yet He never sinned**. No other person has been born with that dual nature. However, when a person is born again, they are indwelt with that capacity not to sin, **IF** they yield unto the Holy Spirit that dwells within them. In Hebrews 5:8, the writer said Jesus learned obedience **THROUGH** the things He suffered. How often have we begged God to deliver us **FROM** our suffering rather than welcome it as an opportunity to learn how to trust and obey? In 1 Peter 1:7, the Apostle wrote: *"The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."*

 The genealogy of Jesus is a beautiful illustration of God's plan for man's redemption.

- In the first period of Israel's history, God gave birth to Israel through Abraham and dominion through David. In Genesis 1:26-27 and Psalm 8:6, God created man to have dominion over all the earth.
- In the second period of Israel's history, Israel lost its dominion because of its disobedience to God and its wicked behavior. They became slaves to ungodly nations because of their defiance of God. In the same way, man lost his right to dominion through his willful disobedience to God's Word.
- In the third period of Israel's history, in which we live today, Israel will soon triumph over her enemies through her faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, just as any person on earth can do today, if they will express their faith in Christ as their Savior.



The genealogy of Jesus is divided into three sections, each with 14 generations. During those 4,000 years between Adam and Jesus, things may have appeared to be chaotic and confusing, and they were, just as they are today as we are living them out day by day. However, from God's perspective, the outcome was never in question. Even though some "skunks" tried to stink up the process, God's purpose and elective promises were fulfilled according to God's plan. The fifty-cent word for that is "sovereignty" – out of three sets of 14 generations, God's sovereignty and elective process was revealed. Behind, under, above, and through it all, God was working His eternal purpose according to His Divine plan, and He still is today.

Before we continue in our study, may I urge you to pause and thank God for your family, past and present. Some

might wonder why you need to thank God for your ancestors because you have discovered that not many of them were true believers. *Join the crowd!* I ask every “Edwards” I meet if they had any “horse-thieves” and “bootleggers” in their family because if they did, we are probably kin!

The fact that you are reading this book, wanting to learn more about Jesus Christ and His love proves one thing:

Regardless of your human heritage, whether godly or ungodly, by His grace and His grace alone, God has supernaturally and sovereignly called you to Himself.

In fact, it may have been the more ungodly ones in your genealogy that caused you to question the real purpose and meaning of life. *Again, join the crowd!* I witnessed the excruciating results of the sinful choices of many of my family members, and even as a child, God tugged at my heart and urged me not to follow in their path. I witnessed the deep heartache and depressing humiliation that others went through when their family members made wrong choices.

As a teenager, God tugged at my heart and gave me the desire to live a more meaningful and purposeful life.

We can't do anything about our spiritual heritage except thank God for where we are today. Whether we had good role models or bad, it is by His grace that we are where we are, and it is by His grace that we can leave a pathway of faithfulness for others to follow.



First Friday in Advent

Read Matthew 1:18

One of the essential doctrines of the Christian Faith is referred to as the “virgin birth” of Jesus. Actually, Jesus was born just like any other child, but He was not conceived like every other child. To be the “Christ-child” – the “Messiah” – He could not inherit the sin nature that God handed down to all men because of Adam’s sin. So, as Matthew described it, Mary was “*found with child*” (*discovered to be*) before she and Joseph came together.

Never before had a man been “born of the Holy Spirit,” and it has never happened again. One must accept the evidence given in the Holy Scriptures, for that is all the evidence we have. Yes, it is a matter of faith, but it is not a matter of conjecture. God promised to send a Savior through the “seed of woman,” and women are not the seed-bearers; men are. So, thousands of years before Mary was born, God had already determined to use her womb to implant the “Seed of the Savior,” and in the fullness of time, as Paul said in Galatians 4:4, He kept His word.

The word for “Christ” and “Messiah” is the same word: *Christos*. Messiah is the Hebrew word, and Christ is the Greek word, but both words have the same meaning, and they both refer to the same Person: *The Anointed One*.

In verse 16, Jesus “is called Christ,” He is recognized as the *Anointed One of God*, the Messiah. Just as we will live the next 17 days in anticipation of Christmas, so the Jews lived for 400 years in anticipation of the coming of the long-promised Messiah. Their lives were hard and harsh under Roman rule, and they lived with the daily expectation that God would send His Deliverer, like King David, to set them free. Many men claimed to be the Messiah, and led their followers to rebel against the Romans. Barabbas, the insurrectionist who was set free in the place of Jesus, is just one example.

The Messiah they sought was expected to do several things:

- **Nationally** – He was to be a leader like David, who would free the Jews from Roman oppression, establish Israel as an independent nation, and restore Israel to its former glory.
- **Militarily** – He was to be a great warrior like David, who would lead the Jews to victory over every nation that had come against them.
- **Religiously** – He was to be God’s representative sent to restore righteousness over all the earth.
- **Personally** – He was to be the one to bring peace to the whole world.

Obviously, even though Jesus declared Himself to be the Messiah on three different occasions, **because He did not fit their concept of the Messiah or allow Himself to be used as the Messiah they wanted**, they rejected Him and arranged for His crucifixion.

In Acts 2:22-36, as Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, stood to preach, he said:

- Vs. 22 – *“Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.”*
- Vs. 32 – *“This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.”*
- Vs. 36 – *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.”*

The name *Jesus* shows Him to be a man. The name *Christ* shows Him to be *God’s Anointed* – it is His official title, not His second name, as we often misuse it. The name *Christ* identifies Him as God’s:

- **Prophet** – Deuteronomy 18:15-19, Luke 3:38
- **Priest** – Psalm 110:4, Luke 3:32-38
- **King** – 2 Samuel 7:12-13, Luke 3:24-31

Many people continue to reject Jesus as their Savior and Lord today because He does not fit their concept of the Messiah. Many others have expressed their faith in their own concept of Christ and think they are truly saved when they aren’t. It is imperative that we have the true, biblical concept of Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.



First Saturday in Advent

Read Matthew 1:18-23

Having read or heard the story so many times, we tend to overlook many of the intricate details of these events and how they affected the lives of the people. The birth of God's Son into the world was one of the most disturbing events in human history, and for several reasons:

- **There was Mary's pregnancy** – the idea of the Messiah being born to an unwed mother was a thought no one had ever considered. The idea she would be the woman to give birth to the Messiah was a thought Mary had never considered. How do you think Mary felt, knowing she was in the will of God but also knowing the tongues were wagging behind her back, even among the members of her own family?
- **There was Joseph's dilemma** – the shock of hearing of Mary's condition broke his heart, not only because it cast doubt on Mary's moral integrity but also because of the position it put him in regarding her future. In that day, Mary could have been stoned to death.
- Had Joseph, who was 17, and Mary, who was 12-14, not disregarded the criticism they were receiving and surrendered their lives unto God's use, what could have happened regarding God's plan of redemption?
- We can be thankful the "pro-abortion" crowd didn't get to Joseph and Mary. **Think about it!**

- **There was the place of Jesus' birth** – even though Jesus had to be born in Bethlehem, the city of David, to fulfill biblical prophecy, Joseph and Mary still had to endure the shame of spending that night in a cave that was used as a barn. Do you think they had questions about why God was allowing His Son to be born in such a horrible place? Had they misheard what the Angel Gabriel had said to them?
- **There was the quick move to Egypt** – again, two teenagers, willing to obey the prompting of the Holy Spirit without question; without considering their personal safety, or knowing how they would survive in a foreign nation. How would these two young people explain this quick move to their families?
- **There was the slaughter of children under two years of age** – even though the warning of such a slaughter was the reason Joseph and Mary moved to Egypt, when they heard the news of the actual slaughter, it had to disturb them. How much more could these two teenagers take in their willingness to be the father and mother of the very Son of God?
- **There was the visit of the Magi** – showing that the birth of the Messiah had affected other foreign nations. When the wise men showed up, **about two years after the Lord's birth**, they too were in the limelight; they too were reminded of the value of this special child and their responsibility to be His parents.
- **There was the uproar at Herod's house** – while they were both respectful and obedient to their elders and religious authorities, being the parents of the Son of God caused them to stand against the rules of man, and obey the Word of God.

Jewish marriage customs were far different from those couples follow today, especially in the West. In that day, most marriages were arranged by the parents of the bride and groom, and often without consulting either of them. A contract price was set, which the groom's parents paid, which meant the couple was "legally married." This betrothal period would last a year, when the marriage ceremony would be held, and the marriage union would be consummated physically.

It was during this betrothal period that angel Gabriel visited Mary and told her of her impending pregnancy. That's why she asked, *"How could this be, seeing I have not known a man?"* And even though Joseph agreed to take her as his wife, he had no physical union with Mary until she gave birth to God's Son, and he (Joseph) gave Him the name, Jesus.

We may find the above custom difficult to comprehend, but it is an exact picture of our relationship with Christ.

God the Father set the contract price for our redemption, and Jesus paid that price for all those who will believe in Him. As the Bride of Christ, we are legally married to the Groom, Jesus, Who has gone to prepare a place for us to live with Him forever. On the day which is soon to come, the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout – "come forth," and we will rise to meet Him in the air. The marriage ceremony will be held at the Father's House, and while the guests are enjoying the marriage feast, we will be physically united with the One who purchased us with His blood. Amen and Amen. Maranatha!

They had traveled from afar and night was coming on.

*They sought a place to wait the new day's dawn.
Joseph asked in vain for lodging,
no room would there be, for God's own Son's nativity.
To a cattle-stall they came so weary and so worn,
And there it was the Son of God was born.
Born in humbleness was He,
the Savior for every man.
His lowly birth was in God's plan.
There was no room, no room for them.
There was no room to lay their newborn Child.*
© 1978 by Triad Music, Inc. All rights reserved



*Sleep, holy Child, so meek and so mild,
Jesus, wonderful Son of God.
The day is coming when you will grow to be a man,
One day, Your death will then complete salvation's plan.
The angels are above You, thru this lonely night.
Sleep on, sweet Jesus, till the morning light.
Sleep, holy Child, so meek and so mild.
Jesus, wonderful Son of God.*
© 1978 by Triad Music, Inc. All rights reserved



Second Sunday in Advent

The Lighting of The Bethlehem Candle – (purple) the candle of peace – Luke 3:4-6

As we re-light the first purple candle, we remember the meaning of the word “advent” is “coming” or “visit”! We are preparing for the Advent of Christ at Christmas; walking through those historical steps, and taking our time so we can understand and cherish every memory of them.

- We remember Israel’s hope for the coming of God’s Messiah to save, forgive and restore.
- We remember our own need for a Savior to save us from our sins and to restore our broken relationship with God.
- We are reminded of our hope for the second coming of Christ and to prepare our hearts for His soon return.

By lighting one candle each week, we pause to think upon the birth of Christ, event by event. Last week we focused on the prophecies regarding His coming; how many of those prophecies were fulfilled in His birth, His life, His death, and His resurrection, and how the rest of them will be fulfilled when He returns. Seeing how God kept His promise to the people of Israel encourages us to believe God will keep His promises to us.

Today, we focus on the coming of Christ, who brings us peace. As we light the Bethlehem candle and read the Holy

Scriptures, may our joy over our Lord's first coming overflow our hearts, and may our anticipation for Christ's second coming be renewed.

- Read Psalm 130:1-8
- Read Jeremiah 31:31-34
- Read Luke 1:68-79

We light this candle because, like God's people centuries ago, we also need a Savior who will forgive our sins. The purple color reminds us of the seriousness of our sin and our great need for God's forgiveness.

Prayer of Hope

Dear God, as we light this candle, we recognize our sin, our need for a savior, and Jesus Christ as the Savior we need. We long to present ourselves to You in His pure righteousness alone.

*Mary was the first to hear it!
Name that came from heaven above.
Name that raises souls from darkness,
This the only name worth singing of.
Wonderful name – Jesus
Name angels sang the night all heaven rang.
Wonderful name – Jesus
Heaven touched His name with glory,
Precious name of Jesus us our King.
In God's Word is told the story,
Of this wondrous name, the angels sing.
Wonderful name – Jesus*

© 1978 by Triad Music, Inc. All rights reserved



Second Monday in Advent

Read Matthew 1:24-25

As we begin our personal studies this week, let's review the four main things Matthew wants his readers to know about the birth of the Son of God.

- Vs. 18 – *"Mary was found with child of the Holy Ghost".*
- Vs. 20 – *"That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."*
- Vs. 22 – *"Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled... behold a virgin shall conceive and shall bring forth a son."*
- Vs. 23 – *"They shall call His name, Emmanuel...God with us."*

Matthew was not interested in giving a detailed account of Jesus' birth. His concern was that his readers knew and understood this was no ordinary birth of an ordinary baby boy. This was the birth of the Promised Messiah. The Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah's birth had been fulfilled to the letter. Secondly, the Jew's scandalous and slanderous reports that Jesus could not be the Messiah because He was born out of wedlock only proved their lack of knowledge of Holy Scripture. The central fact that Mary conceived the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit, and not by human means, was the main and essential evidence that Jesus was the Messiah.

The word "Emmanuel" is not a name or a title, as we are prone to use it today. It is actually a description of the nature

of Christ – He was, and is, God with us – God revealed in human flesh.

While the focus of attention is rightfully upon Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus, Joseph should also merit our appreciation for his willingness to obey God, despite the appearance of things, including the wagging of tongues.

In my opinion, Joseph acted as God would have every man to act in the same or similar situation. Of course, he was hurt when he first heard the news, for he had no idea what was going on until the Angel told him. But when he was convinced that what he and Mary were experiencing was of God, he was merciful, gentle, forgiving, helpful, and he followed through with an attitude of gratitude for the opportunity to be a part of what God was doing in Mary's life. Joseph was a godly man because of the way he revealed God's character to Mary.

Sadly, this is not the image of men today, even among Christians. Joseph was no more than 17 years of age. Still, when we compare his ability to accept personal responsibility and handle personal adversity with the majority of 17-year-olds today, we must question the methods we are using to turn boys into men. Even as I write this study, college students are protesting against their schools over issues that, compared to what Joseph endured, should make them absolutely ashamed. Are the schools equipping them to handle the issues of life, or are they filling their minds with the false idea the world owes them life? You will find that answer in their life choices.



Second Tuesday in Advent

Read Matthew 2:1-2

I hope you are beginning to get the picture that nothing about the birth of Jesus was “normal!” The way He was conceived, the place He was born, the announcement by the angels, and the visit of the shepherds on the night of His birth, were “supernatural” events, and the fact that they have never been duplicated substantiates their validity and their accuracy in proclaiming Jesus as the one, true, God-sent-Savior of the world.

Around two years after His birth, Jesus received a visit from three Wise Men from the East. They had watched the stars for years, expecting something significant to happen, including a new King for the nation of Israel. On the night Jesus was born, a brightness in the East caught their attention, and they followed it to Jerusalem.

These men were from Persia, which is modern-day Iran. They were men of higher learning, the skilled scientists of their day. They were skilled in philosophy, science, medicine and astrology. They were the ministers and advisors to their Persian rulers. Even though it is said the wise men came “seeking the King of the Jews,” it was God who put that bright star in the sky and that hunger in their heart for the truth about God.

Perhaps it would be good just to let one of the great Christmas Hymns fill in the blanks for us today. "We Three Kings of Orient," was written by John Henry Hopkins, Jr., in 1871. Hopkins was the son of pioneer parents from Ireland and Germany. After graduating from the University of Vermont in 1839, he tutored the students of a family in Savannah, Georgia. He later returned to Vermont and graduated from General Theological Seminary, where he served as their first instructor of church music.

*We three kings of Orient are;
bearing gifts we traverse afar,
field and fountain, moor and mountain,
following yonder star.
Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,
gold I bring to crown Him again,
King forever, ceasing never, over us all to reign.
Frankincense to offer have I,
incense owns a Deity nigh;
prayer and praising, voices raising, worshiping God on high.
Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume
breathes a life of gathering gloom;
sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying, sealed in the stone-cold tomb.
Glorious now behold Him arise;
King and God and Sacrifice;
Alleluia, Alleluia, sounds through the earth and skies.
Star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright,
westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.*



Second Wednesday in Advent

Read Matthew 2:3

Because three gifts were given, we have assumed there were three wise men. The Book of Tradition says there were three: Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. But, since the Bible does not confirm that, we can only conclude the number of the wise men did not matter.

It is also a common misconception the wise men visited Joseph and Mary and baby Jesus in the barn at Bethlehem, but not so. They followed the star they saw on the night of the Lord's birth, and it eventually led them to Jerusalem. But with the speed of caravan travel in that day, it could have taken months, or even years, to travel the 800 to 900 miles from Persia to Jerusalem. In Matthew 2:11, he said, *"and when they were come into the house, they saw the young child, with Mary, his mother, and fell down and worshipped Him."*

Most likely, the reason the wise men knew of this star was because of the teachings of the prophet Daniel. (Daniel 9:24-27) Even as a captive, God arranged for Daniel to serve as the chief of the court of "seers" in Persia. Daniel taught them about the prophetic timeline, including the expected time of the Messiah's birth. Balaam prophesied that a "star would rise out of Jacob."

Notice the wise men called that miraculous star, “His star” – they believed God’s Word, they sought to find the Messiah, they pursued Him persistently, never giving up until they had found Him. And, when they did, they worshipped Him by giving Him the most expensive gifts they could offer Him. *Oh, that we would be wise men today.*

But not only were they wise in searching for Jesus, they were also wise to the plots of the antichrist. They heeded God’s warning against returning to tell Herod where they had found Jesus, and they went home by another route.

At one time, Persia, or modern-day Iran had the gospel. Even though Daniel was taken captive and treated as a captive, God arranged his duties as a servant so he could influence others with the truth of God’s Word. As God did with Joseph in Egypt, He also did with Daniel in Babylon, and with Paul in Rome, and with other men of God who have been and are being held captive.

Christian Pastor Saeed Abedini was arrested and sent to the most horrible prison in Iran in 2012. He was charged with preaching the gospel, converting people to Christ, and helping the underground house-church network in Iran. Abedini was released from prison on January 16, 2016, along with other American prisoners. Saeed said the reason the Lord put him in prison was to reach Iranians with the Gospel. Every time Satan tries to silence one of God’s servants, he just opens the door for them to have a greater influence on those who may have never heard the gospel.



Second Thursday in Advent

Read Matthew 2:4-6

King Herod, or Herod the Great, as he liked to be called, was a cruel, power-hungry ruler who destroyed anyone he feared was trying to topple him from his throne. He even killed several members of his own family because he thought they were plotting against him.

When the wise men came to Jerusalem, they asked the people where they could find this new-born-king of the Jews. When King Herod heard what the wise men were asking, he demanded his chief priests and scribes tell him where the prophets said this new king was to be born, and he demanded the wise men tell him where they found Him, so he could worship him too. But, as we will see, his assistance to the wise men was for his own benefit, as was his desire to find the Christ child.

While Jesus did come as the spiritual king of the Jews, He had not come to take over the throne of Herod. Satan knew that, but he deceived Herod and put the fearful thought into Herod's mind: **"With this new king of the Jews, your throne is in danger. You must eliminate this new king as soon as possible."** When Satan entered Herod's heart and Jesus became a threat to his rule, he began to plot to kill Jesus Christ.

Joseph and Mary were weaklings compared to Herod's armies, and a newborn baby was no match for the King. So, his plan was made: Herod ordered the death of every child in Bethlehem under the age of two.

What Herod did not know was that God had already warned Joseph and Mary about his diabolical plot, and they had already escaped to Egypt to protect Jesus. So, while God prepared the way for Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to be spared, King Herod died at the end of this chapter.

Herod wasn't the last ruthless ruler to try to destroy Jesus Christ and His people. Even in our day, evil men are still rising up against God's people, both Jews and Christians. Very soon, the Lord Jesus will return to judge all evil, and Satan's defeat will be complete. The question now is this: **"On whose side, are you?"**



Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem



Second Friday in Advent

Read Matthew 2:6

In Micah 5:2, the prophet wrote: *"And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."*

The chief priests and scribes knew Micah referred to the birth of the Messiah, but they had not connected the prophecy with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. This is why God caused Caesar Augustus to issue an edict that everyone should return to their hometown for a census. He had to get Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus to fulfill biblical prophecy.

In John 7:42-43, the Apostle wrote about a division among the people about who Jesus really was. Some said He was the Christ; others said He wasn't because He began His ministry in Galilee. But someone asked: *"Hath Scripture not said that Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?"*

Bethlehem Ephrathah was where David was born. It was not equal to the historical city of Jerusalem; it was a *"little city among the clans of Judah,"* but it would serve as the God-ordained birthplace of the Messiah.

Why did God choose a small, out-of-the-way place like Bethlehem? Because that's the way God has worked since

the beginning. As the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:27-31, *“God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.... Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”*

God chose Bethlehem as the place where He would do something that would change the course of history and eternity. That baby born in Bethlehem was not only to be the King of the Jews, He would also become the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, and one day, He would rule the world with His truth and grace.

- God chose a stable so the innkeeper couldn't boast that he owned the hotel where the Savior was born.
- God chose a feed-trough for the baby's bed so the carpenter would not boast that he had made the bed for the Savior.
- God did not choose us because we were better than anyone else or because He knew what we could accomplish or achieve “with His help,” which is utter nonsense. God is not impressed with our impressions of our strengths and abilities.
- God chose the likes of us so He could prove to the world what He could do with “nothing” that was dedicated to Him as humble instruments of His glory and His grace – nothing more, nothing less, nothing else! When we sing “Glory to God in the highest,” He gets the glory. We get the joy!

What Bethlehem looked like in the day Jesus was born.



What the city of Bethlehem looks like today.



The Church of the Nativity covers the cave where Jesus was born.



The star marks the spot where the cave was where Jesus was born.





Second Saturday in Advent

Read Matthew 2:8

King Herod Augustus, or as he preferred to be called Herod the Great, was appointed King of Judea by the Roman government. This was an insult to the Jews because Herod was not a Jew, and regardless of what he did to mediate between the Jews and the Romans, including rebuilding the Temple, he always failed.

Herod was paranoid. Jewish historian Josephus said Herod murdered his wife, her brother, and father, along with his own friends, and hundreds of military leaders. He even killed three of his sons; accusing them of treason.

Herod did not want a new king to take his place. So, he went to the Jewish religious leaders who knew the Old Testament prophecies regarding the coming Messiah to find out what the prophets had said about where this new King would be born, and they told him Bethlehem.

Then he asked the wise men when they first saw the star so he could calculate how old the child would be by then. King Herod was planning the massacre of children so he could remain as king. Do you wonder why this part of the Christmas story is rarely mentioned?

In this historical record, we can see several different groups of people, their actions, and reactions to the news about the birth of the long-awaited Messiah.

- When they saw the star in the East, the wise men from a very pagan nation left their homes and families and set out on a very long and dangerous journey of 800-900 miles, hoping they would have the opportunity to worship this new King of Israel. Think of the various preparations that would have been necessary even if there were only three men. This trip could have taken them as long as two years.
- On the other hand, Herod became angry at even the thought of someone taking over his position of power. He knew if these wise men had traveled that far to see this child, there was something about that child that struck fear in his heart, and he deceived the Magi into helping him at least develop his evil plan.
- But the religious leaders and the common people who lived in Jerusalem at that time should trouble most. Either they were unaware of what was happening in Bethlehem, because they had not learned the truth about biblical prophecy, or over the years they had become apathetic towards the promise of God. These were the very “children of Abraham,” the very people to whom God had made His great promises. They were supposed to be watching and waiting for the coming of the Messiah. However, according to Matthew 2:3, everyone in Jerusalem was troubled.
- Isn't it interesting that we find the same attitude among God's people today regarding the Lord's second coming? Which group are you in today?



Third Sunday in Advent

The Lighting of the Shepherd Candle – (pink) the candle of Joy – Luke 2:7-15

As we re-light the first two purple candles, we remember Advent is a word that means “coming” or “visit.”

We are preparing for the Advent at Christmas, walking through those historical steps, and taking time to understand and cherish every memory of them.

- We remember Israel’s hope for the coming of God’s Messiah to save, forgive, and restore.
- We remember our hope for a Savior to save us from our sins and restore our broken relationship with God.
- We are reminded of our hope for the second coming of Christ, and to prepare our hearts for His soon return.

By lighting one candle each week, we pause to think upon the birth of Christ, event by event. Over the last two weeks, we have focused on the prophecies regarding His coming, the many prophecies that were fulfilled at His birth, and how the balance of them will be fulfilled when He returns. Seeing how God kept His promise to the people of Israel encourages us to believe God will keep His promise to us, and we look forward to the day He comes again.

Today, we remember the Lord, Who is our Shepherd. As we light the Shepherd’s candle and read the Holy Scriptures,

may our joy over our Lord's first coming overflow in our hearts, and may our anticipation for Christ's second coming be renewed.

- Read Psalm 126:1-6
- Read Zephaniah 3:14-20
- Read Philippians 4:4-7

We light this candle because, like God's people centuries ago, we know that God has come in Christ and that Christ will come again. We rejoice in God's work in history and in the future. The pink color means joy!

Prayer of Hope

Dear God, as we light this candle, we rejoice. We know the first act of the Christmas story ended with the birth of Jesus the Messiah, and we know that He will soon come again in all of His glory. So even though the story isn't over, we wait for You, rejoicing in hope. Amen!

*Wonderful message from heaven,
wonderful promise to sing;
Savior of sinners is Jesus,
Down through the years it will ring.
Great is His grace and His mercy,
Great is His kindness and love;
Now and forever, we'll praise Him,
Here and in heaven above
Alleluia, Alleluia
Let all our voices agree.
Alleluia, Alleluia
Savior of sinners is He.*

© 1978 by Triad Music, Inc. All rights reserved



Third Monday in Advent

Read Matthew 2:9-10

Because we have heard the story so many times, and because we learned a lot of our Christology from the commercial Christmas Carols, we have overlooked some very important details.

After the wise men received their instructions from King Herod, the Bible says, *“and lo, the star, which they saw in the East, went before them.”* Apparently, the star had disappeared, and according to verse 10, they didn’t expect that star to appear again, but it did, and they rejoiced. It must have been close enough to the earth for them to follow it because rather than leading them to Bethlehem, where Christ was born, it led them to Nazareth, right to the home where Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were living.

I once knew a man who was born and lived in India. He was a scientist employed by the Coca-Cola Company and a staunch believer in Hinduism. Somewhere in the course of his life, he heard about the love of God as expressed in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Whether it was his natural curiosity as a scientist or his hunger for the true meaning of life, he knew in his heart he wanted to know more about this God who loved him so much that He sent His only Son to die for him.

My friend said one day, he went out to the banks of the Ganges River and knelt down to pray. He looked up into the sky and said something to this effect: **“God, if the god I am worshipping is not the true God, I want to know this one, true God. If there is something else, I need to learn about You, I want to know it, and I’m willing to do whatever it takes to know it.”**

Several weeks later, and much to his surprise, he received notice from Coca-Cola, asking him to transfer to Atlanta, Georgia to help in the development of what became the “pop-top-can.”

In his testimony to our discipleship class, he said, **“Coca-Cola brought me to America to help on this project, but God brought me to America to learn about Him.”** He became one of the best Bible teachers I’ve ever known.

Once these wise men from the East saw the star that reminded them of Daniel’s prophetic word, they left their homes and families and spent a fortune in search of the new-born King of Israel, and God guided them on their journey every step of the way. Two years earlier, the long-awaited Messiah was born in Bethlehem, just six miles from Jerusalem. But even the religious leaders had not bothered to see if the rumors about Mary and Joseph were true, or if that boy-child that was born to that peasant girl was, in fact, the very Son of God.

What a shame that man gets so caught up in his dead “religion” that he misses the opportunity to discover and worship the one true and everlasting living God.



Third Tuesday in Advent

Read Matthew 2:11

Undoubtedly, the wise men were astounded to see this newborn King in such humble surroundings. No doubt they had expected Him to be the Son of royalty, perhaps a reigning monarch with all the splendor and wealth He would deserve. But even though they found Him in a common home with common parents, these learned men bowed down and worshipped Him.

Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. The Bible does not give any symbolic significance to these three gifts, other than their inherent value. However, tradition says there is a deeper meaning for each of the three.

- Gold is a precious metal and, as such, it is a very valuable commodity. Gold is a symbol of divinity and is mentioned throughout the Bible. Pagan idols were often made from gold and the Ark of the Covenant was overlaid with gold. **The gift of gold to the Christ child symbolized His divinity—God in the flesh.**
- Frankincense is a white resin or gum. It is obtained from a tree by making incisions in the bark and allowing the gum to flow out. It is highly fragrant when burned and was used in worship as a pleasant offering to God.

Frankincense is a symbol of holiness & righteousness. The gift of frankincense to the Christ child was symbolic of His willingness to become a sacrifice, wholly giving Himself up, analogous to a burnt offering.

- Myrrh was also a product of Arabia, and was obtained from a tree in the same manner as frankincense. It was a spice and was used in embalming. It was also mingled with wine to form an article of drink. Such a drink was given to our Savior when He was about to be crucified, as a stupefying potion. In Matthew 27:34, it is referred to as “gall.” Myrrh symbolizes bitterness, suffering, and affliction. The baby Jesus would grow to suffer greatly as a man and would pay the ultimate price when He gave His life on the cross for all who would believe in Him.





Third Wednesday in Advent

Read Matthew 2:12

The Scriptures are silent regarding how long the wise men stayed with Joseph, Mary, and Jesus, and we will respect that silence. However, Matthew leads us to believe that once their discovery was made, and the gifts were given, perhaps not wanting to interrupt their humble dwellings with their regaliant presence, they mounted their camels and began their journey home. Or, perhaps, they bedded down for the night, but at some point, God awakened them and instructed them not to go back to Herod, but to return home by another route, and they obeyed that warning.

We have no further account of these wise men. The Bible does not tell us whether they became believers in Christ as their Savior and Lord, in anticipation of what He had been sent to do to save men from their sins or what report they made to the people in their own country of their journey to Israel to see Him.

God is faithful to send people warnings when danger is near. God did not want Herod to find out where Jesus was, so He instructed the Wise Men not to go back to him and tell him what they had found. The Magi LISTENED to God, and they went home a different way.

Some have questioned God's use of a "star" in leading these men to find the Christ-child. They point to the fact that God spoke to Mary, Joseph, Zechariah and other characters in the Christmas story through dreams and angelic visits. Why did He use a "star" for these men?

First, in Matthew 4:15, quoting the prophecy of Isaiah 9:2, Matthew said, *"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."* In Matthew 5:14 and John 8:12, the gospel writers describe Jesus as the Light of the world, and those who follow Him will never walk in darkness. In Philippians 1:15-16, the Apostle Paul said those who tell others about Jesus shine like stars in a dark night sky. The light of truth is what those who live in the darkness of sin need to see.

Secondly, these men were astronomers who studied the heavens. Having been taught biblical prophecy by Daniel, and knowing when that prophecy was to be fulfilled, they were looking for the sign that confirmed the time. What these men saw and followed was not a "star" like we see at night but the very appearance of the Shechinah Glory, the visible manifestation of God's presence. So, having heard the revelation of God from the teaching of Daniel and seeing the very glory of God in the heavens, these learned men knew that something special was happening, and they deduced from the Scripture (not the star) that the King of the Jews had been born. While many people may have seen the "Light," only those who had learned the Scriptures could discern its meaning.



Third Thursday in Advent

Read Matthew 2:13-15

Not only did God warn the Magi about Herod, but He also sent His angel to warn Joseph to leave Israel, go to Egypt, and remain there until the Lord told him to return.

Joseph put Mary and Jesus on the donkey again and left for Egypt, and they stayed there until King Herod died. Notice how God provided for their journey and stay: Gold, incense, and myrrh, which could be used or converted into funds to pay their expenses.

There were two reasons why Joseph, Mary, and the Baby Jesus had to escape from Israel to Egypt.

- King Herod was mad and had already made plans to eradicate this new king in a very horrible way.
- That the words of Hosea 11:1 might be fulfilled that said, *"Out of Egypt have I called my son."* While this was not a prophetic passage as Isaiah 9:2, Matthew was saying that God's "calling" of Jesus out of Egypt was in parallel to God's "calling of His son" (Israel) out of Egypt – connecting Jesus with the promise of Abraham and the leadership of Moses. In other words, God's provision and protection of Jesus was evidence that He was the Messiah, sent by God to fulfill the Law and the Prophets and to give His life as the propitiation for man's sins.



Third Friday in Advent

Read Matthew 2:16-18

When the Magi didn't return to tell Herod where they had found the new-born King, Herod was furious. He was so filled with anger and rage, he ordered all the baby boys, age two and under, living in or near Bethlehem to be killed. Since he couldn't find out which baby was a threat to his kingdom, he ordered all the baby boys to be killed to make sure Jesus, this new King of the Jews would be killed.

Since Bethlehem was such a small town at that time, the estimated number of boys killed on that night was between 20 and 60. This may be the reason this particular event is not recorded in the secular history of Israel in that day. The second reason might be that, because Herod suffered severe paranoia, his ruthless killing of innocent people had become commonplace. Caesar Augustus said Herod had killed so many of his own family, **"It was better to be Herod's hog than his son."** Herod's paranoia about doing whatever was required to hold on to his power and suppress any kind of dissent earns him a well-deserved place alongside the names of the great tyrants and dictators of world history, who, by their diabolical decisions, prove they have absolutely no respect for the sanctity of human life.

Lord Acton is credited with this quote: **"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely,"** and as

we see the political climate we are living in today, it seems we have learned nothing from history. For while we can understand why the ungodly leaders of the world can slaughter the innocent to protect their positions of power, it is hard for us to conceive those who claim to be Christians can do the same thing and have no conviction about it and that includes mothers who choose to end the life of their babies while in the womb.

Abortion is the clearest evidence of Satan's delusion upon our society. He has convinced mothers, doctors, nurses, judges, and political leaders that an innocent, human life can be taken without consequence to the mother, the medical profession, or to our nation. Herod's decision took the life of 20 innocent baby boys. The Supreme Court's decision to legalize abortion has taken the lives of more than 63-million babies since 1973. While there may be a medical condition that could cause pregnancy to threaten the life of the mother, the main reason for abortion today is no different from Herod's day: **that baby is a threat to their status in life.** Wasn't that child in Mary's womb a threat to Mary and Joseph's plans?

While we know the life of our Savior was spared, and Herod died shortly thereafter, we can only wonder how many doctors, scientists, evangelists, godly leaders, and others with special gifts of music, art, and other talents have been destroyed before they had a chance to live, and how long it will be before our nation dies.

Before we move on, do you know who Rachel was? Rachel was the wife of Jacob. While traveling from Bethel to

Bethlehem, she stopped near Raman because the time had come to give birth to her baby. According to Genesis 35:16-20, she delivered a son, but not without great difficulty, and with her dying breath, she named him "Ben-Oni," meaning son of my trouble. Fortunately, Jacob renamed him Benjamin.

So, when Herod killed the baby boys, it reminded Matthew of Rachel, who went weeping to her grave at Ramah. Rachel not only represents every mother in Bethlehem, she also represents every mother who has suffered for her children; especially those who have had a miscarriage, lost a newborn or buried their children. She stands for every mother who lays awake at night worrying over her children.

Matthew doesn't include it, but the prophet Jeremiah told the "Rachels of the world" where to find their comfort. In Jeremiah 31:16-17, he wrote: *"Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded, declares the Lord. They will return from the land of the enemy, there is hope for your future, declares the Lord. Your children will return to their own land."*

Sorrow and grief do not have the last word in our lives. A mother may refuse to be comforted over the loss of her children, but God will comfort her nonetheless. Therefore, Rachel's tears were not in vain, and not forever.



Third Saturday in Advent

Read Matthew 2:19-21

When Herod died, God called Joseph to bring Jesus back to Israel. So, Joseph and Mary loaded the donkey again, and moved to Nazareth, where Jesus lived until He began His ministry.

Everyone in the Christmas story had to decide what to do about the Messiah who had come.

- While they certainly did not understand it all, Joseph and Mary loved their new baby, and they risked their own lives and everything they had to protect Him.
- When the Shepherds heard the angelic choir proclaim His birth, they left their flocks, which was unheard of in that day, and went to Bethlehem to find Him.
- When the wise men saw the glory of God in the sky, they knew God was up to something, and they left their families and invested their fortunes to find Him.
- When the Jews in Jerusalem heard about His birth, they were troubled because He wasn't the kind of King they were looking for, and they had become quite comfortable in their religion.
- When Herod heard about Him, he was furious, and made plans to kill Him.
- Everyone must make their own decision about this Christ-child. The question is, what will YOU do with Him?

We need to see that several Biblical prophecies were fulfilled in this chapter:

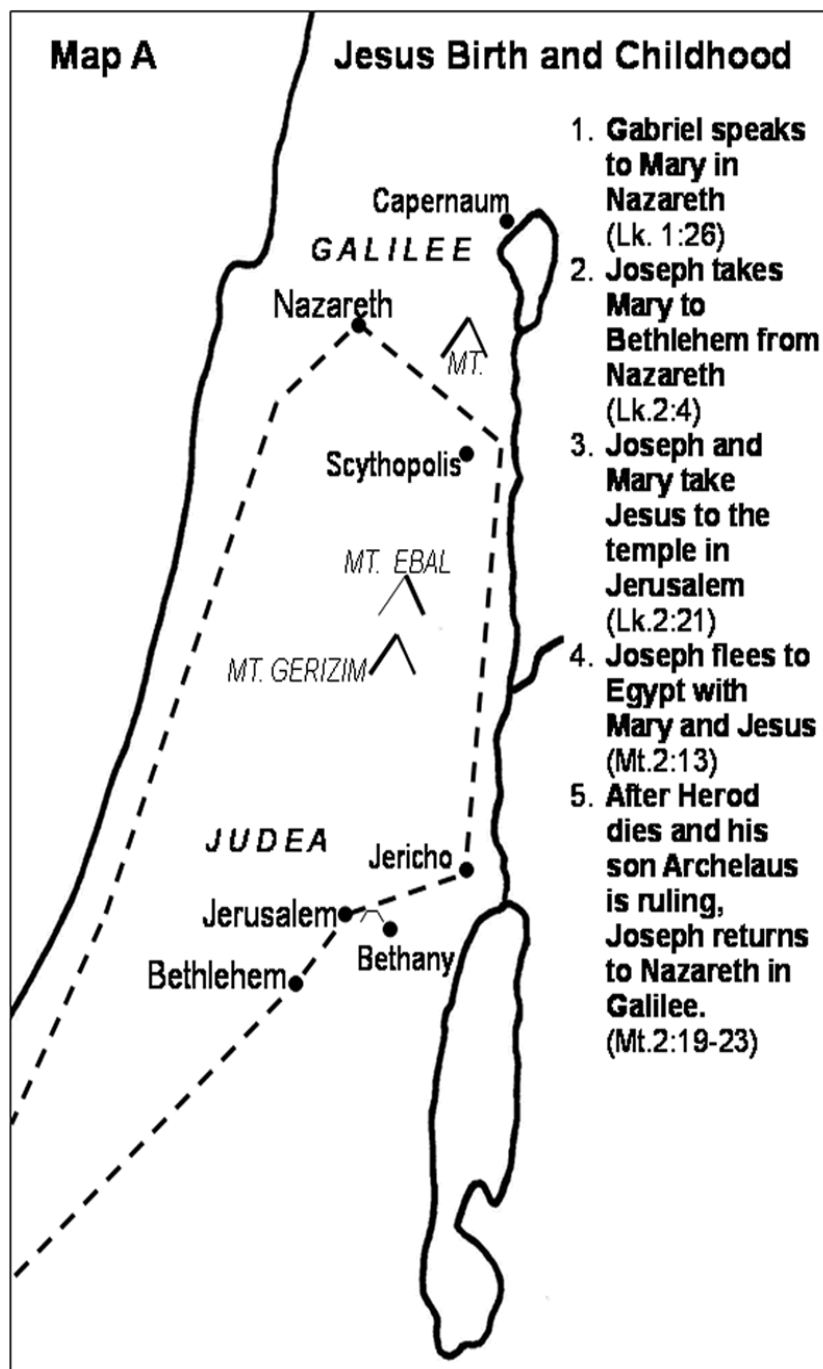
- **Jesus was born in Bethlehem**, fulfilling the prophecy of Micah 5:2.
- **Jesus was brought out of Egypt**, fulfilling the prophecy of Hosea 11:1.
- **Jesus lived in Nazareth**, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 11:1.

It is also important for us to see several Biblical principles we need to obey:

- God does not give the believer a road map with every stop along the way or even the point of destination. Instead, God leads His children step by step, to keep us dependent upon Him.
- His goal is to strengthen our faith and trust in Him.
- Believers need to wait upon God before making a move. Waiting is a part of learning obedience. When we take the first step of obedience, God will show us the second step and tell us when to take it.
- Parents sow the seed of life or death into their children. Herod was a ruthless, murderous maniac, and his son, Archelaus, followed in his footsteps. Joseph was a lover of God, faithful to his wife and family, and obedient to God's call upon his life. Even though he was always aware that Jesus was God's Son, he cherished the time with Him and trained Him as if He was his own, even saving funds for Jesus to attend school when He turned 15. When Jesus was 12, Joseph died from an accident, but not before he had raised Jesus to assume responsibility for His mother and the rest of the family.

Map A

Jesus Birth and Childhood





Fourth Sunday in Advent

The Lighting of the Angel Candle – (purple) the candle of love – John 3:16-17

As we re-light the two purple candles and the pink candle, we remember the meaning of Advent is “coming” or “visit”!

We are preparing for the Advent of Christ at Christmas, walking through those historical steps, and taking our time to understand and cherish every memory of them.

- We remember Israel’s hope for the coming of God’s Messiah to save, to forgive, and to restore.
- We remember our own need for a Savior to save us from our sins and restore our broken relationship with God.
- We are reminded of our hope for the second coming of Christ and to prepare our hearts for His soon return.

By lighting one candle each week, we pause to think upon the birth of Christ, event by event. For the last three weeks, we have focused on the prophecies regarding His coming and how many of them were fulfilled in His birth, His life, His death, and His resurrection, and how the rest will be fulfilled when He returns. For as we see how God kept His promises to Israel, we are encouraged to believe God will keep His promises to us.

Today, we focus on the coming of Christ – the evidence of God’s love. As we light the Angel’s Candle and read the Holy Scriptures, may our joy over our Lord’s first coming

overflow in our hearts, and may our anticipation for Christ's second coming be renewed.

- Read Psalm 89:1-4, 19-37, 46-52
- Read Isaiah 9:1-7
- Read Luke 1:26-38

We light this candle because, like God's people centuries ago, we need a Savior who will forgive our sins. The purple color reminds us of the seriousness of our sins and the joy of being fully forgiven forever.

Prayer of Hope

Dear God, as we light this candle, we look ahead with hope to the birth of your Son — the Son of David, the son of Mary. May we be prepared to welcome him with open arms and open hearts. O come now, Son of David! Amen!

***A thousand times in history, a baby has become a king
Only once in history, has a King become a baby***

Divinity, humanity, your step of supreme love,

To leave the splendor of all heaven; we worship you above.

We place our lives before you, in submission, faith and grace,

As we offer up our praise, for Your love for fallen race.

We bend the knee, acknowledging the sacrificial cost.

We bow our heads in worship, knowing we were lost.

We kneel before your throne, humbled, in deepest need.

As we offer up our praise, take our lives, for this we plead.

Clare Wiltshire, Bournemouth, England

The Lighting of The Christ Candle – (white) – John 1:29

Our waiting is over – Christmas Day is here. As we relight the three purple candles, and the pink candle, we now celebrate the birth of Christ our Savior and Lord.

- The first purple candle was the Prophecy candle, the candle of hope.
- The second purple candle was the Bethlehem candle, the candle of peace.
- The third candle, which is pink, was the Shepherd's candle, the candle of joy.
- The fourth candle, the last purple one, was the Angel candle, the candle of love.
- Today, we light the fifth candle, the white one, which is the candle of Christ. Jesus Christ, the light of the world, has come into our hearts and we rejoice in knowing our sins are forgiven and we are assured of heaven.

As we light the center candle, may we joyously celebrate the good news of Christ's birth, as well as the joy that filled our hearts, when He was "born again" in us.

Read Micah 5:1-5

Read Luke 2:1-20

Read Psalm 145:1-3

We light this candle with great joy and celebration because Christ is born in Bethlehem. God's Son has come into the world to be our Savior! And he will come again in glory.

Prayer of Joy and Adoration

Dear God, as we light this candle, we rejoice in the birth of your Son. May we worship Him, welcome Him, and make room for Him in our hearts. O come, let us adore Him! Amen!



*Let all the world this night rejoice,
joining in praise with happy voice.
Heaven has touched the earth with glorious light and life,
Let all the world this night rejoice.
Jesus has come at last as prophets had foretold,
Let all the world take up the song.
Let all the world rejoice and sing!
Let joyful songs and anthem's ring!
Christ, the Lord of love, has come this holy Christmas night,
Let all the world rejoice and sing.*

© 1978 by Triad Music, Inc. All rights reserved

*King of Love, King of Love
King of Love, we worship You.*

*In my heart, In my heart,
In my heart, there is room for You.*

*Lord divine, Lord divine,
Lord divine, we praise Your name.*

*Here's my life, Here's my life,
Here's my life, I belong to You.*

GREAT KING OF LOVE
WE WORSHIP YOU

© 1978 by Triad Music, Inc. All rights reserved

Heritage
BAPTIST CHURCH

257 Lake Joy Road, Perry, GA 31069
Wayne J. Edwards, Pastor

Devotionals by Pastor Wayne Edwards
Available at

www.reasonsforhopeJesus.com

