No Greater LOVE

THE SALVATION ARMY

ADVENT

Devotional 2026

YOUTH Down SOUTH



No Greater LOVE

THE SALVATION ARMY

WEEK ONE

Hope

NO GREATER LOVE THAN
A GOD WHO REMEMBERS

NOVEMBER 27: LUKE 1:5-25

God remembers Elizabeth & Zechariah.

Captain Carla Raymer

"The Lord has done this for me," she said. 'In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.'" **John 1:25**

HOPE. What do you think of when you hear the word 'hope'? Today's story comes from Luke chapter 1 and is a story of just that...HOPE.

It's a story that involves two people: Zechariah and Elizabeth who both came from priestly families. In other words, they came from families who were chosen by God to lead people in worship at the holy Temple in Jerusalem, that was Zechariah's job. The Bible describes them as people who knew the scriptures well and did all the right things before God. The Bible also tells us that they were quite old...okay, very old, and they had no children. Zechariah and Elizabeth loved God, but they had prayed for a long time to have children. To be so old and not have any children back then was considered to be a shameful thing, a very bad thing. And unfortunately, people looked down on them for not having children. But this did not stop Zechariah and Elizabeth from serving God anyway.

Well, one day, while Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, an angel appears and tells him, "...your prayer has been heard." (Luke 1:13) Zechariah and Elizabeth couldn't believe it! While they were waiting, God was still working something out for them. He had not forgotten about them. God's answer to their prayer ended up being even bigger than they could have imagined, because their son named 'John' would be the one who would help announce Jesus's arrival. Their answer to prayer, would be the one to prepare the way for Jesus. How cool is that?

Sometimes, as we wait, it can seem like God isn't listening. But hope isn't wishing that everything will work out exactly how we want it to. Hope is knowing that God never forgets His people. God remembered Zechariah & Elizabeth. God remembered us as He sent His son Jesus to die on the cross so that we may be saved. And still, God remembers us today. There is no greater love than a God who remembers!

MEMORY VERSE

"Look what the Lord has done for me!" Luke 1:25

Look (point to eyes) what the Lord (Point up to ceiling) has done (palms out in front of you) for me! (point to yourself)

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- Have you ever waited for a really long time for something? How did it feel?
- What do you think it was like for Zechariah and Elizabeth to wait? Do you think they ever wondered if God had forgotten them?
- How does knowing that God remembers you, give you hope today?

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, thank You for hearing our prayers. Help us to be patient and to know that even if we don't understand what takes so long, you have not forgotten us. Help us to trust Your promises with hope, just as Zechariah and Elizabeth waited with hope. As we enter the Christmas season, help us to keep in mind so many that are without hope, and help us to pray that they would be reminded that our God is a good God, that our God has not forgotten about us, and therefore, we...have...HOPE.

NOVEMBER 28:
PRACTICE OF LOVE – SHARE HOPE

God gives us hope, so we can help others feel remembered and loved.

CHOOSE ONE THIS WEEK:

- Draw a picture or make a Christmas card for someone who is sick, lonely, or in a nursing home.
- Call or video chat with a grandparent or another family member just to say hello.
- Bake cookies and deliver them to a neighbor.
- Pray together every day for someone who is waiting for good news or going through a hard time.
- Leave an encouraging note in someone's lunchbox or on their desk.
- Smile and say hello to someone who seems lonely at school or church.

Conversation Starter: Who around us might need a little hope this week?



No Greater LOVE

THE SALVATION ARMY

WEEK TWO

Peace

NO GREATER LOVE
THAN GOD'S FAITHFUL CARE

NOVEMBER 30: LUKE 1:26-30

God sees the humble.

Ashley Escobar

"In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.' Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.'" **Luke 1:26-30**

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was chosen by God to birth THE Savior. Not only to give birth to the Savior but to RAISE a savior. Parents, could you imagine raising THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD? Kids, could you imagine being the savior of the world and still having to clean your room and go to school?

When the angel Gabriel visited Mary, I'm sure she had a million questions running through her head. Scripture says in Luke 1:29, "Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be."

Of course, God knew she might feel this way, which is why the angel began with comforting words in verse 28: "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." In verse 30, the Angel tells Mary, "Do not be afraid..."

Mary was given the biggest responsibility to carry into the world. Ultimately, this was the best thing that could ever happen in the history of ever! Finally, a Savior to rescue us from sin and darkness so that we could be in the light and in a right relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Do you think Mary was chosen for this great task because she was perfect and never made a mistake in her life? Nope! Was Mary chosen because she came from a family with a lot of money? Absolutely not. Or maybe Mary was chosen because she had over 3 million followers on her YouTube channel? I can assure you, that's a definite no.

Mary was chosen because she was 'highly favored' by God.

Scripture doesn't say Mary was highly favored by man. She wasn't an influencer or rich or popular. Yet, God CHOSE her – not because of her greatness but because of HIS greatness.

It was because of her humility that she was chosen by God for this great responsibility. Mary refers to herself as 'the Lord's servant' in verse 38. It was her servant-heart and trust in God that allowed her to accomplish what God had called her to do.

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- Mary was afraid and had questions, but God reminded her that He was with her. When have you felt nervous about something, and how can remembering that God is with you help?
- God chose Mary because of His greatness—not because she was rich, popular, or perfect. What does this teach us about the kind of people God can use?
- Mary called herself "the Lord's servant" and trusted God with the responsibility He gave her. What is one way our family can serve God or someone else this week?

PRAYER

God, we thank You for sending Your son, Jesus. He is the greatest gift. We thank You for people like Mary, who said yes to You even when they felt afraid. Help us to live humbly and to trust You when You ask us to do big things. You love us and have great plans for us. So, as we go about our week, we ask that You open our eyes to ways we can serve and love others around us. In your name, we pray, amen.

No Greater LOVE

DECEMBER 1: LUKE 1:31-38

God works through willing hearts.

Captain Jordan Hinson

"You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.' 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.' 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled.' Then the angel left her." **Luke 1:31-38**

Today in our scripture there was an angel that came to Mary and told her that she would have a baby. Not only that, but she was also told by the angel that her baby would be the Son of God. Can you imagine what Mary must have been feeling in that moment? How would you feel? Anxious. Scared. Excited. Confused. You might even feel all those things at the same time.

Mary must have been nervous and confused. She says to the angel, "How can this be, I am not even married?" She had no idea how this could even be a possibility. This plan did not make any sense, but God had big plans for Mary. The biggest plan for the biggest story of all time. She was going to be the mother of Jesus. That is one of the most amazing things anyone had ever heard, but at that moment, it was very hard for her to believe.

Have you ever been asked to do something that you thought was going to be too hard for you? Maybe it was something that you knew you needed to do, but it made you nervous.

Just recently there was a story on the news about a little boy that knew in his heart he needed to do something God asked him to do. He needed to be a friend to someone who was getting made fun of at school. He went home and told his mom that he knew that God wanted him to be a friend to the child who had no friends, but he was too nervous. He did not want to get made fun of. His mother reminded him that sometimes God asks us to do hard things, but that God would be with him. She reminded him that nothing is impossible with God. The boy knew what he had to do. The next day he went to school and made sure the child that was being made fun of knew he had a friend. This gave both of their hearts so much peace. God worked through this little brave boy and his willing heart. God used this story of friendship to change his new friend's life and eventually changed his whole school. God had big plans for him, even though it seemed like what God wanted him to do was too hard.

In our Scripture we see that Mary had been given some very big plans from God. Although it seemed too hard, Mary had a willing heart. When Mary asked the angel how any of this would be possible, the angel told her that the Spirit of God would be with her, and that nothing is impossible with God. Mary trusted God. She found peace in what she thought was just too hard. God was with her. Mary said yes to God, and she was faithful to what God asked her to do.

DECEMBER 1: LUKE 1:31-38

God works through willing hearts.

Captain Jordan Hinson

Mary was a part of God's big, amazing plan, and so are all of you. God has big plans for you. They might seem too hard or too big, but God is with you. What God wants from His children is for them to have a willing heart. He promises to be with you and wants you to remember that nothing is impossible with God.

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- Have you ever been asked to do something that felt like it was too hard?
- How does it feel to know that nothing is impossible with God?
- What hard thing can you do this week with God's help?

PRAYER

Dear God,
You are amazing and we are so grateful that nothing is impossible for You. Help us to remember that You are with us and will give us all the strength we need when we do hard things. Help us to be brave like Mary when we are scared or confused about Your plan. Amen.

DECEMBER 2: LUKE 1:39-45

God is near when we celebrate together.

Major Jamie Spalding

"At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" **Luke 1:39-45**

Have you ever seen someone and been so excited that you jumped for joy? Maybe a cousin you only get to see at Christmas time? Maybe your best friend at camp? Maybe meeting your baby sibling for the first time? You're so excited that you can't help but hop up and down in delight!

That's what we see happen here in this scripture. When Elizabeth, who is six months pregnant with her son John, sees her cousin Mary, who is pregnant with the baby Jesus, the baby in Elizabeth's belly jumps for joy – can you imagine what that might have felt like? Or what it might have looked like – everybody give it a try!

One of the ways we experience the nearness of Jesus is gathering together with others who love Him to celebrate what He's doing in our lives – just like Mary and Elizabeth did! We can praise Him and remind each other that we are never alone!

Something about being in the presence of Jesus changes us. Sometimes, while we are singing songs to Jesus, we will suddenly feel Him near to us and be so happy. Sometimes, when we are spending time in prayer, we will sense Jesus surround us and feel protected. Sometimes, even on the hardest days of our lives, we will realize that Jesus is right beside us and feel at peace.

The good news of Christmas is that Jesus came to be present with us. The word Emmanuel, which we use a lot this time of year, means "God with us." We might still go through difficult things in our lives. Mary certainly has some scary times coming up in the Christmas story, but through it all, we can have peace because God is with us. Even when life feels loud and chaotic, the same Jesus who made baby John jump for joy is here with us.

Jesus is near... so we can be at peace.

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- What is something that makes you so happy you want to jump for joy?
- Can you think of a time when knowing Jesus was with you changed the way you were feeling?
- Is there anything happening in school, at church, or with our family that makes you feel a little nervous or anxious during this Christmas season? How can remembering Jesus is near help in that situation?

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, thank You so much for being present with us. As we gather together to celebrate this season, we pray for Your peace over our homes, our friends, and our family. Amen

No Greater LOVE

DECEMBER 3: LUKE 1:46-55

God cares for the humble and vulnerable.

Kaitlin Chambless

"And Mary said, 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.'" **Luke 1:46-55**

When you think about the Christmas season, what are the first things that pop into your head? Maybe it's building a snowman? Decorating a Christmas tree? Or even singing all those classic Christmas carols (some of us a little more joyful in tune than others)? For me, I instantly think of Tim Allen's "The Santa Clause", Christmas Eve at Waffle House, and the excitement to open the gifts hiding within all that wrapping paper under the tree and reveal what is inside!

As great as all those things sound, in Luke 1:46-55 we hear from Mary about the GREATEST gift that could ever be given to her (and to us): JESUS! Mary sings her praises and gives thanks to God for the gift of her baby and the promises of God that Jesus brings us through His birth. Mary says in Luke 1 that God shows His faithful care for His children through His mercy given to those who believe and follow Him every day from grandparents to parents to kids (v. 50). Her rejoicing also reminds us that God will break down our pride (v. 51-52) and we need to have a humble heart that will not take credit for the good things in our life (even the delicious Christmas cookies!) Instead, we should be humble like Mary by giving that credit to God and telling others the truth about the Creator and ultimate Giver of ALL things in our lives. This will produce peace, gratefulness and thankfulness to Jesus in your family's lives.

These verses also show us how God cares for the vulnerable: people in need of food, clothing, shelter and safety. It says He will fill the hungry with good things, take away from the prideful rich and help His people with every need they have (v. 53 – 54). So, we can find peace in God's goodness and trusting that He is faithful to keep His promises to give us good things in our time of need. And because of this, we can remember that He will help us to help others who are vulnerable during this Christmas time and be on the lookout in our schools and neighborhoods to share the peace and promise of this Good News!

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- Why is Jesus the best gift ever given?
- How can we be like Mary and find peace in the middle of all the busy, fun Christmas traditions to take time to remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus?
- What is one way you as a family can help someone you know in need this Christmas season?

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, we thank You so much for the gifts of our family, friends, food on our tables, and even the gifts under the tree. But most importantly, we thank You for choosing to become a baby born in a manger who would grow up to give us peace and salvation that saves the whole world from sin by reuniting us with God our Father and Creator. Help us to find peace in this busy season by remembering there is no greater love than God's faithful care for us and to choose to have a humble heart that follows, listens and obeys God every single day. Let us celebrate You, the Prince of Peace, by helping those in need and sharing Your peace with others this Christmas. Amen.

DECEMBER 4: ISAIAH 9:6-7

God's peace comes through Jesus.

Major Nicole Parker

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this."
Isaiah 9:6-7

Christmas can get LOUD!

Christmas music...1, 2, 3 (say or if you're really brave, sing your favorite Christmas song!) Ok, on to the next things...School programs, parties, oh don't forget about the presents and family gatherings. And bell-ringing with your friends and family! People talking...lots of talking! Lots of excitement, wouldn't you agree?

But sometimes the loudest noise isn't around us. Sometimes it's inside us!

So, try something.

Everyone get still and put your hand over your heart.

Can you feel it?

Thump. Thump. Thump.

That's your heartbeat.

Now take a slow breath and feel it again.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

Your heart has been beating all day, even when you weren't thinking about it. And right now, as you feel that steady beat, remember something even more important: God sees you. God cares for you. God is with you. Sometimes our hearts beat a little faster because we're excited. Sometimes they beat faster because we're nervous, worried, afraid, or unsure. And sometimes Christmas can hold a little bit of all those feelings! Have you ever felt like that? Maybe not just in the Christmas season?

Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, God gave His people a promise (don't you love a good promise?)

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this." Isaiah 9:6-7 NIV

DECEMBER 4: ISAIAH 9:6-7

God's peace comes through Jesus.

Major Nicole Parker

Did you hear that last name? PRINCE OF PEACE! God knew exactly what His children needed. They needed more than a quiet moment. They needed more than everything around them to be perfect. They needed Jesus. And on that first Christmas, God kept His promise. He sent Jesus right into our noisy, messy, exciting, sometimes worry filled world. Jesus came to save us and to show us just how deeply God loves and cares for us. That's what makes the peace Jesus gives so different! Peace doesn't mean everything around us is peaceful. Peace means we know WHO is with us in the MIDDLE of it. Our peace isn't something we have to find underneath the Christmas tree. We don't have to create it by making Christmas perfect. Our peace is found in Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

As Salvationists, Christmas can be one of our busiest seasons of loving and serving others. We ring bells, worship, sing, give, serve, and share with our communities. But in all the excitement, we don't want to miss the greatest gift God has given us or the greatest gift we can point others toward: Jesus!

So put your hand over your heart one more time.

Feel that?

Thump. Thump. Thump.

Let each beat remind you:

Jesus is with me!

Thump.

Jesus cares for me!

Thump.

Jesus gives me peace!

Thump.

When Christmas is exciting, He is with you!

When something doesn't go as planned, He is with you!

When you are worried, He is with you!

When you don't know what comes next, He is still with you!

That is God's faithful care!

DECEMBER 4: ISAIAH 9:6-7

God's peace comes through Jesus.

Major Nicole Parker

And there is No Greater Love than that! Let that sink in for just a moment...that's the greatest gift!

The **Heartbeat** Challenge

Sometime today, when Christmas gets busy or when you feel worried, frustrated, nervous, or even super excited: STOP.

Put your hand over your heart.

Feel your heartbeat.

Take a slow breath.

Repeat these words:

Jesus is with me.

Jesus cares for me.

Jesus gives me peace.

And then ask Jesus to help you carry His peace with you wherever you go.

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- What did you notice when you stopped and felt your heartbeat? How could your heartbeat remind you that God is nearby?
- Isaiah calls Jesus the Prince of Peace. What do you think that name tells us about Him?
- Who might need to experience the peace and love of Jesus this Christmas? How could your family share it with them?

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for being our Prince of Peace. Thank You for coming near and for showing us how much God loves us. When our hearts are excited, worried, afraid, or unsure, help us remember that You are with us. With every heartbeat, remind us of Your faithful care. Fill our family with Your peace and help us share Your love with others this Christmas. Amen.

DECEMBER 5:
PRACTICE OF LOVE – BE A BLESSING

God's peace helps us care for others.

CHOOSE ONE THIS WEEK:

- Help pack food for a local food pantry.
- Make a care bag with snacks, water, and encouraging notes to give to someone in need.
- Pay for someone's drink or treat (even something small.)
- Write thank-you notes to teachers, bus drivers, coaches, or crossing guards.
- Pick toys or clothes to donate together.
- Pray for someone who is having a difficult week and let them know you prayed for them.

Conversation Starter: How can our family bless someone today?

No Greater LOVE

THE SALVATION ARMY

WEEK THREE

Joy

NO GREATER LOVE THAN MERCY
THAT CHOOSES KINDNESS

DECEMBER 7: MATTHEW 1:18-19

God sees our confusing moments.

Major Doug McClure

"This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly." *Matthew* **1:18-19**

This is a story we don't often talk about during the Christmas season. We know Mary and Joseph. We know the manger, the shepherds, the star. But we forget that before any of that happened, Mary and Joseph were an engaged couple, and engagement back then wasn't like it is now. It was a formal, binding agreement between two families. Everyone was already counting on a wedding.

Then, in the middle of all that, Mary is going to have a baby. And Joseph knows it isn't his.

Verse 19 tells us Joseph was a great guy about it. He didn't want to hurt Mary's feelings. He didn't want to embarrass her or her family, so he planned to break things off quietly and let her move on with as little pain as possible. Think about that for a second. He'd just had his whole future turned upside down, and his first thought was still about taking care of her. That says a lot about the kind of man Joseph was.

We found out later why all of this happened. An angel came to Joseph and told him, "Don't be afraid." Mary hadn't done anything wrong. The child she was carrying was the Son of God, sent to be exactly who God's people had been waiting on for generations. Joseph and Mary weren't just going to get married. They were going to have the chance to raise the Savior, not just of their own people, but everybody's Savior. That's a huge deal!

That's what makes this such a confusing story to land right in the middle of something so joyful. We think about Christmas and we picture the lights, the music, the good feelings. But real joy is often confusing. We can feel happy about something and still feel concerned. We can feel great and still feel like something isn't fully settled. That's just how it goes sometimes, and I don't think we always have to have it figured out.

Here's what I keep coming back to: God sees us. Even in our confusing moments, even when we don't have the answers yet, God sees us right where we are. That's how much He loves us. He knew what Joseph was feeling before Joseph said a word about it, and He loved him through it. Whatever your family is walking through this Christmas, whatever isn't wrapped up neat this year, you're not alone in it. God sees the confusion too, and His mercy is something we can lean on every single day.

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- Joseph felt hurt and confused, but he still chose to be kind to Mary. Why do you think that mattered?
- Can you think of a time when you felt happy and confused about the same thing at the same time?
- What does it mean to you that God sees us even when we don't have all the answers?

PRAYER

God, thank You for seeing us, even in our confusing moments. Thank You for sending Jesus into a situation that didn't make sense to Joseph at first, because that means You meet us in our confusion too. Help our family trust You when things aren't fully clear and help us love each other the way Joseph loved Mary. Thank you for Confusing Joy! In Jesus' name, amen.

DECEMBER 8: MICAH 6:8

God calls us to choose mercy.

Melissa Powell

"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." **Micah 6:8**

Joseph had incredible courage. He chose to follow God's leading in a situation that probably felt confusing, painful, and even hopeless at first. But God was doing something far greater than Joseph could have imagined. Mary and Joseph were going to be the parents of Jesus!

Can you imagine being told that? The Savior of the world was coming – and God had chosen them to be part of the story.

But Joseph's story didn't begin with joy. It began with a difficult choice.

If we look back into the Old Testament, we find that God's people often struggled to follow Him. God had been faithful to them again and again, but they often responded by turning away from Him. They worshipped other gods, disobeyed His commands, and treated one another unfairly.

In the book of Micah, we find a picture that feels a little like a courtroom. God brings a case against His people because they have turned away from Him. He asks them, "What have I done to you?" God had been faithful. He had cared for them. He had rescued them. He had shown them kindness and mercy over and over again.

So, the people ask, in frustration, "What do You want from us?"

And Micah 6:8 gives them the answer:

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

God wasn't asking His people to perform some huge, impossible task. He wanted their hearts to reflect His heart.

He wanted them to do justice.

That means treating people fairly and doing what is right. Have you heard of the Golden Rule? Jesus later taught us to treat others the way we want to be treated. God wants us to care about what is right – not just when it benefits us, but because it reflects who He is.

He wanted them to love kindness.

God doesn't want us to show kindness only when it is easy. He wants us to love mercy – to delight in giving people mercy they don't deserve. Mercy means choosing not to make someone pay for the wrong things they've done. It means choosing compassion instead of revenge and kindness instead of shame.

DECEMBER 8: MICAH 6:8

God calls us to choose mercy.

Melissa Powell

He wanted them to walk humbly with their God.

Being humble doesn't mean thinking you aren't important. It means remembering that God is God – and we aren't. It means trusting that His way is better than our way, even when we don't understand what He is doing.

And then, hundreds of years later, we meet Joseph.

Joseph's story gives us a beautiful picture of Micah 6:8.

When Joseph discovered that Mary was going to have a baby, he didn't understand what God was doing. From his perspective, Mary had been unfaithful to him. He could have responded with anger. He could have made sure everyone knew what had happened. He could have chosen shame and rejection.

Instead, Joseph chose kindness.

And isn't that what God did for us?

When our world was broken by sin, God could have stayed far away. Instead, He came near. He sent His Son, Jesus, into our world to rescue us.

Christmas is the story of God's incredible mercy choosing to come near.

This Advent, may we learn from Joseph to do what is right, love showing mercy, and walk humbly with our God. Because when we choose kindness, we reflect the heart of the God who chose mercy for us. And there is no greater love than mercy that chooses kindness.

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- What are some ways we can choose kindness when someone hurts or disappoints us?
- Micah 6:8 tell us to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God. Which one of these is easiest for you? Which one is hardest? Why?
- How can we show God's kindness and mercy to someone else this week?

PRAYER

Thank You for showing us Your great mercy by sending Jesus to us. Thank You for Joseph and the way he chose kindness, trusted You, and followed Your plan even when he didn't understand it. Help us to do what is right, love showing mercy, and walk humbly with You. Amen.

DECEMBER 9: MATTHEW 1:20-21

Love requires courage.

Major Rick Raymer

"As he lay awake considering this, he fell into a dream, and saw an angel standing beside him. 'Joseph, son of David,' the angel said, 'don't hesitate to take Mary as your wife! For the child within her has been conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a Son, and you shall name him Jesus (meaning 'Savior'), for he will save his people from their sins.'" **Matthew 1:20-21**

Imagine, if you will, a story of a young boy named Joseph who was carrying a very special gift box. He did not understand what was inside the box, and he felt a little scared to open it because he did not know what to do or what was in it. But here is the joyful part: sometimes God's greatest gifts begin with a surprise! Later that night, God—and we all know who God is, right? He's the Creator of everything good, including you and me. And because He loves us so much, He sent His Son, JESUS, to help us find our way to heaven. That is a reason for big joy!

Let's get back to Joseph. Later that night, while he was fast asleep, God sent an angel with a message full of peace and joy: "Do not be afraid. God has something special in mind." Joseph may have felt unsure, but God was helping him see that His plan was good, loving, and joyful.

The angel tells Joseph that Mary's baby is from God and that the baby's name will be Jesus. Do you know what Jesus' name means? It means "Savior." A savior is someone who rescues. Jesus came to rescue people—you and me—from sin, which made it possible to bring us close to God. That means joy is not just smiling when things are easy; joy is knowing Jesus loves us, saves us, and stays with us. But in order for that to happen, we must accept Jesus' invitation to follow Him. Have you?

Joseph's story also teaches us something important about love: real love often requires courage. Joseph loved God, and he cared deeply for Mary. Even though he did not fully understand what God was doing, he chose to trust and obey. That took courage. We sing these words in church: "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey." Sometimes loving God means stepping forward in faith when we are afraid. Sometimes loving others means doing what is right, even when it is difficult. Courage is not the absence of fear—it is trusting God enough to do what He asks because of love.

Remember this: God had a loving plan to send Jesus, our Savior, to rescue us from our sins. Joseph could trust God even when he did not fully understand everything. We can do the same because God sent Jesus into our world as a baby boy. And because Jesus came, we can have joy in our hearts—joy that reminds us we are loved, rescued, and never alone.

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- When Joseph felt unsure, God helped him know what to do. How can we trust God when we feel unsure?
- What does the name Jesus mean, and why is that good news for us?
- How does knowing Jesus loves, saves, and stays with us give us joy in our hearts?

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, thank You for coming into our world to rescue us from our sins. Thank You for loving us, helping us when we are afraid, and filling our hearts with joy. Help us trust You and follow You every day. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

DECEMBER 10: MATTHEW 1:22-24

God guides those who listen.

Major Matt Satterlee

"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord has said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" – which means, "God with us." When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife." **Matthew 1:22-24**

Something that we all get wrong is not doing what we say we are going to do. For example, sometimes parents tell their kids that they'll go to Chuck E. Cheese or go to the park and they accidentally forget. It hurts when someone says they are going to do something with us but then forget.

It's like when a man sitting at a restaurant orders a coffee. The waiter says they'll bring it right out, but they forget. The man sits and waits patiently. Eventually the waiter sees the man waiting and says, "Oh! I'll bring it right out. I'm so sorry that I forgot!"

In our Scripture today, God fulfills a promise he made hundreds of years ago. It's just like us to not trust people's promises. Mom said we were going to the park and she forgot. However, God always keeps His promises. He promised that Jesus would come and He did!

We need to be careful when we say we are going to do something. If we say it, we must do it. If we tell our kids we are going out for supper, we must do it. If we tell our parents we are going to clean our rooms, we've got to do it!

Not only should we keep our promises, but we should also know the promises that God tells us. Our Scripture has a big one. "God is with us!" We must believe and obey.

Joseph heard God fulfilled his promises and he woke up and obeyed. So, when we say we are going to do something, let's get to it!

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- Can you think of a time when you said you were going to do something and then you forgot? What happened?
- Can you say a few promises of God that you remember?
- Name one area you need to obey.

PRAYER

Lord God, thank You for always being with us. Thank You for coming. Thank You for fulfilling Your promises. You always do what You say. Please help me do the same. Please help me to remember that You are with me now and forever. Help me to believe that and obey. In Jesus's Name, amen.

DECEMBER 11: MATTHEW 1:23

Jesus brings us God's presence.

Bernie Dake

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us".)
Matthew 1:23

Have you ever been the new kid somewhere? Maybe it was the first day of school, a new church, or the first practice with a team. It can feel lonely until someone smiles, walks over, and says, "Come sit with me."

Doesn't that change everything? That's a little picture of Christmas.

The Bible tells us that Jesus would be called Immanuel, which means "God with us." God didn't wait for us to find our way to Him. Because He loves us so much, He came to us. Jesus is God's way of saying, "I want you to know Me. I want you to be with Me. You are not alone."

That is the true joy of Christmas.

Sometimes we think joy comes from getting the perfect gift or having everything go our way. Those things can make us happy for a little while, but real joy comes from knowing Jesus is with us every day. He walks with us when we're excited, when we're afraid, when we're lonely, and when we don't know what to do next.

But Jesus didn't come only to be with us, He came to bring us into God's presence. Because of Jesus, we can know God as our loving Father, talk with Him in prayer, and enjoy His presence every day. We never have to wonder if God wants us near Him. Jesus came so we could belong to God and be with Him forever.

When we understand the mercy God has shown us through Jesus, loving us even when we make mistakes, something wonderful happens. His love begins to change our hearts. We start looking for people who might be lonely or left out, just as God came near to us. We can smile, invite someone to play, help a neighbor, encourage a friend, or forgive someone who hurt us.

That's what mercy looks like. Kindness is love in action. God's love always moves toward people. Because Jesus came to us, we can go to others with kindness.

This Christmas, remember that the greatest gift wasn't wrapped in shiny paper. It was wrapped in swaddling cloths, the simple cloths used to wrap and keep a newborn baby warm. Jesus came so we could know God, live in His presence, and never be alone. That is a joy no one can ever take away.

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- What does the name Immanuel tell us about God's love for us?
- How does Jesus help us know God and spend time with Him?
- Who is one person you could show God's kindness to this week, and what could you do for them?

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, thank You for loving us so much that You came to be with us. Thank You for making a way for us to know God and enjoy His presence every day. Fill our hearts with Your joy and help us share Your mercy and kindness with others so they can see Your love through us. We love You. Amen.

DECEMBER 12:
PRACTICE OF LOVE – CHOOSE KINDNESS

Jesus fills us with joy that we can share through kindness.

CHOOSE ONE THIS WEEK:

- Sit with someone who is alone at lunch or church.
- Let your brother or sister choose the game or TV show without complaining.
- Tell three people something you appreciate about them.
- Help someone with chores before they ask.
- Include someone new in a game.
- Make a "Kindness Challenge" and see how many kind things your family can do this week.

Conversation Starter: Who can we make smile today?

No Greater LOVE

THE SALVATION ARMY

WEEK **FOUR**

Love

NO GREATER LOVE
THAN GOD DRAWING NEAR

DECEMBER 14: JOHN 1:14

God comes close to us.

Tameka Douglas

"The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." **John 1:14**

Have you ever wished someone could truly understand what you were going through? The amazing truth of Christmas, and really, the entire Gospel is that God didn't stay far away. Because of His great love, He came near.

John 1:14 tells us that Jesus, the eternal Word of God, became human and lived among us. Jesus experienced joy, sadness, friendship, hunger, tiredness, and even suffering. He understands our lives because He chose to step into them. That is what God's love looks like. He didn't simply tell us He loved us; He showed us by coming to be with us.

Jesus' life reminds us that God is never distant. He is with us in our celebrations, our disappointments, our questions, and our fears. Through Jesus, we see the heart of the Father. He is a God who draws near so that we can know Him personally and experience His grace.

As a family, remember this week that no matter where you are or what you are facing, God has not left you alone. His love is always reaching toward you, inviting you to walk closely with Him.

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- What does it mean to you that God chose to come and live among people through Jesus?
- When have you felt God close to you during a happy or difficult time?
- How can our family show God's love by drawing near to someone who may feel lonely, discouraged, or forgotten this week?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for loving us so much that You sent Jesus to live among us. Thank You for drawing near instead of staying far away. Help us to recognize Your presence every day and to trust that You are always with us. Teach our family to show Your love by drawing near to others with kindness, compassion, and grace. May our lives reflect the love of Jesus in everything we do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DECEMBER 15: LUKE 2:8-11

God welcomes the outsider.

Major Joy Robbins

"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 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 2:8-11**

Hi, my name is Benjamin. My father is a shepherd, and they call me "the little shepherd" because I love to go to the fields with him and help take care of the sheep.

I know that being a shepherd is not what everyone would want to be....most think of us as outsiders. Living in the field with the sheep we are often dusty and smelly. We don't rate for much in the world's eyes; they look down on us..... but with the Lord ....in his eyes we are special.

I know, you're probably wondering "How can that be?" Well, let me tell you how I know!

One night in the fields, everything changed. It seemed like a normal night as we were all struggling to stay awake to keep the sheep safe. I have to admit, I was almost asleep when suddenly the fields lit up like we were at one of your football games with the bright lights on the field.

And before us was the most amazing sight! The angels came down from the skies and began singing! I was scared, but also so surprised and shocked and I ran close to my father and took his hand as we listened.

The angel said to us, "Do not be afraid". Well, that was not so easy! And then he said, "I have brought good news that would bring great joy to ALL people." He said that today a Savior had been born, and that He was the Messiah, the Lord! I kept blinking my eyes almost in disbelief and staring at the beautiful, bright sight before me.

After they delivered their message, everything went dark again. The only light came from the soft glow of our fire. I held tightly to my father's hand and held my breath. We looked at each other as my father and the other shepherds talked quietly among themselves.

"Can we go?" I said loudly. "Can I go?"

"Yes," my father replied. We gathered the sheep and prepared to head to Bethlehem.

I was so excited as we searched up one street and down another until we found Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus lying in a manger. I quietly snuck a peek and looked over the edge of the manger. Jesus was so little! I touched his little fingers and looked at him in awe. "So this is the Messiah."

I could not believe that I, an ordinary shepherd boy, who smelled like sheep was here. Not everyone was here to see that the Messiah was just born. I didn't see any kings or queens, and no rich people. Just a peasant boy like me. In a dirty stable looking at our Savior lying in a manger.

That's how I know that, in God's eyes, even shepherds are special.

DECEMBER 15: LUKE 2:8-11

God welcomes the outsider.

Major Joy Robbins

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- What was Benjamin's nickname?
- How did Benjamin feel when he saw the angels?
- Why do you think God chose shepherds to hear the Good News first?
- Have you ever felt left out? How does this story remind us that God loves everyone?
- What do you think Benjamin felt when he saw baby Jesus?

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for loving every one of us, no matter who we are. Thank You for choosing the shepherds to hear the Good News first and for reminding us that we are special to You. Help us not to be afraid, to trust You, and to share of Your birth with others. Thank You for coming to be our Savior. We love you. Amen.

DECEMBER 16: 1 SAMUEL 16:7

God sees the humble.

Heather Hanton

"But the Lord said to Samuel, "Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." **1 Samuel 16:7**

Who is your favorite superhero and why? Personally, I like Spiderman. He is so cool! He calls himself "Your friendly, neighborhood Spiderman", helping to catch the bad guys, nicely wrapping them up in a web, usually dangling from a lamppost or safely stuck to the side of a building. He always says something funny to them like, "Sorry to leave you 'hanging', but I've got to go!"

For Spiderman, most people only see the hero, dressed in a suit and wearing a mask, daring and brave, fighting crime. But what I really like about Spiderman is that underneath all of that, he is an ordinary, nice guy, humble and friendly; someone who is kind, who loves his Aunt May, and helps take out the trash. That is his true superpower – what is on the inside – his true character.

Many times, we tend to see only what's on the outside of a person and we make up our minds about them (good or bad) based only on what we can see with our eyes. Has that ever happened to you?

The Bible tells us that God sees the inside of a person; He sees the heart. God doesn't care what you look like on the outside. He cares more about your character: Are you honest? Do you treat others the way you want to be treated? Do you speak kind words? Do you forgive? Are you humble?

Being humble simply means you think of others before yourself, just like Jesus did.

Jesus could have stayed in heaven forever, keeping His glory for Himself. But instead, He chose to set that aside and was born a human who was humble and kind. He did that because He loves us so much and was even willing to give up His life for us (Philippians 2). Love is His true character – His superpower!

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- Can someone act nice on the outside but have an unkind heart?
- If God looked at your heart today, what would He see?
- What is one way you can show God's love to someone this week?

PRAYER

God, help me to remember that You aren't looking for the strongest, smartest, or best-looking person. You just want me to have a humble heart that loves You and loves others. Thank you, Jesus for Your example of that love. Help me to be more like You each day so that I can share Your love with those around me. Amen.

DECEMBER 17: ROMANS 12:13

Love makes room for others.

Captain Judy Chung

"Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." **Romans 12:13**

Have you ever been left out of something that you really wanted to do? Maybe you weren't invited to a party, or maybe you were picked last for a game of kickball. Or maybe your older brother or sister didn't want you to go out with them and their friends. Whatever the situation, do you remember how it made you feel? Do you recall how you reacted? Would you want anyone else to experience those same feelings? How can we make sure that others feel welcome and included?

In Romans 12:13, it says, "When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality." And if we go back and read verse 9, it says, "Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them." The writer of this book, Paul, was reminding his friends that if they truly loved Jesus, they would genuinely love and care for others. Their love wouldn't just be something they talked about; it would be something people could see.

The greatest example of this is Jesus Himself. God didn't stay far away from us. Even though we were separated from Him because of sin, He came near. Jesus left Heaven and came to earth so that we could belong to God's family. That's what makes God's love so amazing. He made room for us before we ever thought about making room for anyone else.

If we love Jesus and want to live like Him, we should go out of our way to make sure that others not only feel welcome but also loved. No one should ever feel left out or unwelcome if you are in the room, because as Christians, as Jesus followers, the love that we carry makes room for others. When someone is sitting alone, we can draw near. When someone is feeling left out, we can include them. When someone needs a friend, we can be one. Because you never know, you could be the way God chooses to draw near to someone that day.

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- How did Jesus make room for us, and why is that such a special kind of love?
- Can you think of someone at school, church, or in your neighborhood who might feel left out? What is one thing you could do to help them feel welcome?
- How can our family "draw near" to someone who may be feeling lonely or left out this week?

PRAYER

Dear Lord, thank You for making room for us, even when we were far away from You. Thank You for setting such a beautiful example of what it looks like to draw near. Lord, help us to love others well and to show them what it really means to be Your followers. Lead us to the ones who need to experience Your love today. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

DECEMBER 18: LUKE 2:17-20

God's love is meant to be shared.

Emma Edelman

"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 2:17-20**

Imagine that you've been given the best news ever! Maybe you found out you're going to Disney World or the beach. Maybe you're getting a new puppy. Or maybe your friend is coming for a sleepover. It's the kind of news you don't want to keep to yourself—you just want to share it with everyone you see!

In today's Scripture passage, we learned that the shepherds also received the best news ever! The angels had just told them about the birth of Jesus. They knew that He was the Savior of the world! As soon as they learned He had been born, they went to Bethlehem to see Him. Then, they were so excited that they went and told everyone about Jesus. They couldn't keep this news to themselves!

Christmas is the celebration of God sending His Son, Jesus, into the world because He loves us so much. He wants us to be close to Him and to know just how much He loves us. The shepherds actually got to see Jesus as a baby! They knew how much God loved them, and they wanted other people to know that Jesus had come and that God loved them too. They wanted to share the good news!

Even though this happened a long time ago, we can still share the same good news today. God is still with us, and He never leaves us. The Bible tells us that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. That means the good news of His love is still worth sharing!

We can share the good news with everyone we meet. We can share it through the way we treat people and the kindness we show. We can help people, pray for them, and tell them about Jesus. We can share His love in our homes and schools, with our neighbors, friends, and families. God wants us to share the good news of His love with everyone—and He will help us do it!

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- Why do you think the shepherds were so excited to tell others about Jesus?
- What is one way you have seen or experienced God's love?
- Who could our family share God's love with this week, and how could we do it?

PRAYER

Dear God, thank You for loving us so much and for sending Jesus to be with us. Help us to share Your love with others through our words and actions every day. Amen.

DECEMBER 19:

PRACTICE OF LOVE – MAKE ROOM FOR OTHERS

Just as God welcomed us through Jesus, we can welcome others.

CHOOSE ONE THIS WEEK:

- Invite another family over for cookies or hot chocolate.
- Invite a new friend to church.
- Have a family game night and invite someone who might not usually be included.
- Help set the table and make your home feel welcoming.
- Save a seat for someone at church.
- Write welcome cards for first-time visitors or new neighbors.

Conversation Starter: How can we help someone feel like they belong?



No Greater LOVE

THE SALVATION ARMY

WEEK **FIVE**

Light

NO GREATER LOVE
THAN CHRIST WHO RESTORES

DECEMBER 21: JOHN 1:1-5

Jesus is the True Light.

Kristin Mudge

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."
John 1:1-5

Have you ever heard of the Trinity? It's a concept that can be a little bit hard to understand, but it's also important to think about.

The Bible teaches us that there is one God, and this one God is three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father is God. The Son, Jesus, is God. The Holy Spirit is God. Yet the Father is not the Son; the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father. They are distinct from one another, but they are not three gods. They are one God.

That might sound confusing—and that's okay! The Trinity is one of the great mysteries of who God is. We can't completely understand how God can be three Persons and yet one God. There isn't a perfect example in the world that can fully explain it. We don't have to understand everything about God to know and love Him.

What we can know is that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have always been together. The Father sent the Son into the world. Jesus, the Son, showed us what God is like and made a way for us to be forgiven. And the Holy Spirit is with God's people, helping us, guiding us, and reminding us of Jesus. One God. Three Persons. Always God. Always together.

Our scripture passage tells us, "In the beginning was the Word." In this case, "the Word" is a nickname for Jesus. So, we can also read this, "In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God. He was with God in the beginning."

It goes on to say, "Through him (Jesus) all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."

Because Jesus is with God, that means that Jesus was a part of Creation! He spun the Earth into orbit, crafted the land and oceans, and filled the world with all good things.

"In him (Jesus) was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Jesus is the Light of the World. Sometimes our world can feel dark and heavy, like there are storm clouds we can feel deep inside even when the sun is shining. But don't worry! Jesus is the light!
Even when things seem dark, Jesus is there, shining his light. And when Jesus lives inside you, you get to shine his light too. That light shines in the darkness, and it has not been overcome — the light will always win over the darkness!

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- Who are the three Persons in the Trinity?
- What are the nicknames for Jesus in this scripture passage?
- What should we remember when the world feels dark?

PRAYER

Dear God, thank You for showing us that You are one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thank You for sending Jesus, Your Son, into the world to be the Light in the darkness. Thank You for giving us Your Holy Spirit, who is with us, guides us, and helps us follow You. Help us to listen when Your Spirit leads us and to remember that no darkness can ever overcome Your light. Amen.

DECEMBER 22: ISAIAH 61:1-3

Jesus comes to bring healing and renewal.

Captain Ruth Cancia

"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners… to comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve in Zion- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair."
Isaiah 61:1-3

Have you ever tried to fix a toy that was completely smashed, or clean up a room that looked like a tornado hit it? Sometimes, things get so broken or messy that we feel like throwing them away.

In today's scripture, God talks about "ashes." Ashes are what is left over after something is completely burned up and destroyed. Ruined. But Jesus came into our world to do something miraculous. He doesn't throw us away when we are sad, broken, hurt, or making mistakes. Because of His humongous, unstoppable love, Jesus steps into our darkest, messiest moments to bring healing and renewal. He cleans us up. He literally trades our "ashes" for a beautiful crown. He restores us, fixes our broken hearts, and fills our lives with His bright, warm light. There is no greater love than a Savior who looks at our broken pieces and decides to make them brand new.

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- When did you feel sad, lonely, or "brokenhearted"? How did God, family, or a friend help comfort you?
- What do you think it means that Jesus gives us a "crown of beauty instead of ashes"?
- How can our family help bring Jesus's healing and joy to someone else who is having a hard time this week?

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, thank You for Your ultimate love that never gives up on us. Thank You for stepping into our messy days to bring renewal, healing, and light. When our hearts feel broken or heavy, please trade our sadness for Your joy. Help our family to live in Your freedom and share Your life changing love with everyone we meet. Amen.

DECEMBER 23: MATTHEW 2:1-12

Jesus guides those who seek Him.

Major Marion Durham

"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**

Have you ever been scared of the dark? Maybe you had to get a drink of water or go to the bathroom in the middle of the night. You didn't want to walk down the hall, but knew you really needed to! Thank goodness for the nightlights which help us to see in dark places.

When Jesus was born, God sent a star, a light to shine above the place where Jesus laid in Bethlehem. Wise men, or scholars, came from far away, traveling probably by camel, horse, donkey, or even on foot from many miles away.

In Bible times that's how they got around! No cars. Why did they come? Because they saw the star shining in the darkness. These wise men believed that the star was a sign that a great king had been born. They wanted to go and give Him honor. Jesus wasn't just any baby. He was very special and His star's light guided them so they could worship King Jesus.

They followed the star "...until it came to rest over the place where the child was." (Matthew 2:9). It showed them where to find Jesus. What did they do when they found Him? Matthew 2:10 tells us, "When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy." They were so very happy!

The star of Bethlehem showed the Wise Men how to find Jesus in the darkness because Jesus is the Light of the World! (John 8:12) When we follow Jesus, He will always guide us and show us the way to live even when we don't know our way, just like the nightlight in our bedrooms. He brings us comfort and helps us when we're scared or lonely. When we follow Jesus, His Light tells us where to go and what to do.

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- Have you ever been afraid of the dark or felt scared about something? What happened? Read John 8:12 together and talk about how Jesus is the Light of the World. How does knowing Jesus is with us help us when we're afraid? As a family, say His name out loud together: "Jesus is the Light of the World!"
- Look at your family's Nativity scene. Who do you see? Does it include the wise men or the Bethlehem star? Imagine what it would have been like to travel such a long distance to find Jesus. What challenges do you think the wise men faced? Why do you think they believed Jesus was worth the journey?
- Turn off the lights in a room and light a candle (with an adult's help) or switch on a flashlight. What happens to the darkness? How is Jesus like that light in our lives? In what ways can your family shine His light to others this week? After you talk, pray together and listen to Jesus, Strong and Kind by CityAlight.

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, You are the Light of the World! May Your Light shine in me this Advent season. Help me follow You every day. Amen.

DECEMBER 24: EPHESIANS 5:8-10

Jesus helps us walk in His light.

Vicky Leasure

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord." **Ephesians 5:8-10**

Everybody close your eyes for a moment, no peeking! Now point toward the nearest door.

Open your eyes. Did you get it right?

It's much harder to know where you're going when you can't see. Light helps us see what is around us and shows us which way to go. The Bible uses light and darkness to help us understand what Jesus does for us.

In Ephesians 5:8, Paul writes, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light."

Did you catch that? Paul doesn't just say we were in darkness. He says we were darkness, but now we are light in the Lord. Jesus doesn't simply point us in the right direction, He changes us!

Sin separates us from God, and sometimes we know the right thing to do but choose something else. We might tell a lie because we're afraid of getting in trouble, say something mean when we're angry or ignore someone who is being left out.

We need more than someone to tell us, "Try harder!" We need Jesus.

That's part of the incredible love we celebrate at Christmas. Jesus came into our darkness because He loves us. He came to save us from sin, forgive us, and restore us to God. Because of Jesus, we can become children of light.

So, what does it look like to "live as children of light"?

Paul gives us three clues: goodness, righteousness, and truth.

Goodness means showing God's love through what we do. Righteousness means choosing God's way, even when another choice seems easier. Truth means being honest and trustworthy.

And here's the important part: We don't make good choices so Jesus will love us. We choose to follow Jesus because He already loves us.

Walking in His light doesn't mean we'll never mess up. When we make a wrong choice, we don't have to hide. We can tell Jesus the truth, ask for forgiveness, and let Him help us choose His way again.

That is what restoration looks like. Jesus takes what sin has broken and begins making it right.

DECEMBER 24: EPHESIANS 5:8-10

Jesus helps us walk in His light.

Vicky Leasure

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- Why do you think the Bible uses light and darkness to describe the difference Jesus makes in our lives?
- Which do you need Jesus to help you with most right now: goodness, righteousness, or truth?
- When we make a wrong choice, how can Jesus help us get back on the right path?

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for loving us enough to come into our darkness and rescue us. Thank You for forgiving us and restoring us to God. Help us live as children of Your light. Grow goodness, righteousness, and truth in us, and help our words, choices, and actions show Your love wherever we go. When we mess up, remind us that we can always come back to You. Amen.

DECEMBER 25: MATTHEW 5:14-16

We are called to carry Christ's light.

Melissa Powell

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." **Matthew 5:14-16**

Christmas is such a celebratory day! What is your favorite thing about Christmas morning? Is it opening presents, eating a special breakfast, watching a favorite Christmas movie, or being together with your family? What is something your family does every Christmas?

One of my favorite Christmas morning traditions is gathering around the Christmas tree to open presents with a nice cup of coffee in my hand! I love having my family gathered around, feeling the excitement in the air, and seeing all the Christmas lights shining on the tree.

Take a look around your room right now. Can you find three Christmas lights?

Christmas lights are one of my favorite parts of the season because they remind us of something very important: Jesus is the Light of the World.

Christmas celebrates that Jesus, the Light of the World, came into our darkness. God came near to us. He is Immanuel, which means "God with us!" God is not far away. He came close to us. Jesus came into our world, lived among us, and knows what it is like to be human.

So if Jesus came into our world as the Light, what do we do with that Light?

We shine it!

In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus tells His followers that they are the light of the world. He says that we shouldn't hide our light. Instead, we should let it shine so that other people can see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven.

But what does that actually mean?

It doesn't mean we become our own little light bulbs! Jesus the Light. We reflect His light. Because Jesus has saved us and changed us, His love and goodness can shine through the way we live.

Think about all the Christmas lights on your tree. Have you ever wondered how they can all shine at the same time?

The lights are connected together by a wire. When electricity flows through the string, each little light gets the power it needs to shine. The lights aren't making the electricity themselves. They are receiving the power they need from their source.

And what happens when you unplug the lights? They go dark!

We don't shine Jesus' light because we are perfect or because we can do everything on our own. Jesus is

DECEMBER 25: MATTHEW 5:14-16

We are called to carry Christ's light.

Melissa Powell

the source. We need to stay connected to Him and let His light work through us.

Maybe today, shining Jesus' light means sharing your new toy with your brother or sister. Maybe it means help cleaning up the wrapping paper. Maybe it means being patient when things don't go your way. Maybe it means saying, "thank you" and showing gratitude for the gifts you received.

The Christmas lights won't stay up forever. Soon the tree will come down, the decorations will go back into their boxes, and the lights will be packed away until next year. But Jesus' light doesn't come down with the decorations. Jesus calls us to carry His light with us wherever we go.

FAMILY DISCUSSION

- What does it mean that Jesus is the Light of the World? Why do you think the world needs His light?
- What is one way you can shine Jesus' light today? Think about your family, friends, neighbors, or someone who might be having a difficult day.
- What helps us stay connected to Jesus? What is one thing your family could do this week to spend time with Him and let His light shine through you?

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for coming into our world as the Light. Thank You for loving us, saving us, and coming near to us. Help us stay close to You so that Your light can shine through us. Show us how to love, serve, forgive, and encourage others today. May the way we live help people see You and know how wonderful You are. Help us carry Your light wherever we go. Amen.

DECEMBER 26:
PRACTICE OF LOVE – SHINE YOUR LIGHT

We can keep showing Jesus' love all year long.

CHOOSE ONE HABIT TO PRACTICE THIS YEAR:

- Pray for one person every day.
- Write one encouraging note each week.
- Donate one toy and item of clothing every month.
- Help a neighbor with yard work or chores.
- Say one kind thing to each family member every day.
- Read one Bible story together each week.
- Look for one way to serve someone every weekend.
- Keep a "Love Jar" where everyone writes down acts of kindness they did or saw.

Conversation Starter: What is one way our family wants to shine Jesus' light this year?