

Down to Earth

An Advent Devotional



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2020



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INTRODUCTION

There is something about Christmas that captures the imagination. The lights, the decorations, the parties, the music, the movies, and so much more; all of it grabs ahold of us. Indeed, people all over the world get caught up in the celebration. For those of us who know Christ, we clearly know what makes Christmas special. We know that it is a celebration of God's greatest act: God came down to us to save us.

During this season, we will be celebrating a *Down to Earth* Christmas. On Sunday mornings, we will journey through the Nativity as described in the opening chapters of Luke's Gospel. We will see how when God came down to us, He also brought hope, love, peace, and joy with Him.

As you celebrate the Advent with us, we encourage you to reflect on these themes of Christmas over the four weeks leading up to the big day. This booklet is our gift to you to assist you as you celebrate. For each weekday, we have provided Scripture, a devotional thought written by one of our pastors, an applicational challenge, and a prayer. Use this book for personal devotions and/or in your family worship. We pray it blesses you and fills your Christmas with hope, love, joy, and peace over His coming.

Have a very *Down to Earth* Christmas!
Love, Your Pastors



Hope
Came
Down



Hope From the Beginning

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

Genesis 3:15

One of life's most controversial questions is, '*When is too early to start celebrating Christmas?*' Some wait until after Thanksgiving, while others get into the Christmas spirit the moment Halloween is over. I even know one family that keeps a Christmas tree up year-round. There doesn't seem to be a definitive answer.

The celebration of the very first Christmas began much earlier than you may realize. Long before the heavenly host celebrated Jesus on the night of his birth, God began making promises of his coming. The very first promise is found all the way back in the creation story. Adam and Eve—the first of us—had sinned against God and brought the curse of sin upon us all. With their disobedience, humanity was robbed of the gift of knowing and worshiping God. Sadly, mankind found itself in a hopeless state. Yet, as the Lord pronounced curses upon Adam, Eve, and the serpent, a glimmer of hope was found in Genesis 3:15. Imbedded in this curse was a promise of a hope that would come.

These words are the first in the Bible that point to the birth of Jesus and the salvation that He would eventually bring. *Her offspring* refers to Jesus, who was virgin-born (Matthew 1:25) and, thus, literally the offspring of a

woman. '*You shall bruise his heel*' alludes to the death of Jesus on the cross. Like a bruised heel, Jesus' death would be a temporary setback that would bring a greater victory. With his crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, Jesus *bruised* Satan's head—a death blow—and defeated him forever. More importantly to you and me, He won victory over sin and death.

So, there is an answer to the question after all. No matter when you deck the halls, it is never too early to celebrate the hope and victory that Jesus brings.

~ Pastor Darren

God's plan for humanity was not thwarted by our sin. As you begin your Christmas preparations, focus your celebrations on his proactive work on your behalf.

Lord, thank you for having a plan from the beginning to rescue us from our hopeless, sinful condition.

Hope Proclaimed

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Isaiah 9:6-7

Birth announcements have traditionally been a common way for new parents to share the exciting news of the birth of a child. Now, with the popularity of social media, pregnancy announcements have become incredibly popular. These announcements have shown the amazing creativity of people as well as the excitement these new parents have for a child that has yet to be born. I still remember fondly sharing the news that Shae and I were expecting and seeing the joy that news brought to our family and friends.

In today's passage, the prophet Isaiah was making the ultimate birth announcement. He was announcing the birth of Jesus Christ, and this child would be unlike any other. As the *Wonderful Counselor*, He would provide wisdom. As *Mighty God*, He would protect His people. To be the *Everlasting God* would mean He would provide eternal care for His people. That He would be *Prince of*

Peace signified the peace He would bring to earth. The long-awaited Savior the prophets had spoken about was coming and He would provide hope for those who placed their faith and trust in Him.

~ Pastor Danny

This Advent season, cling to the hope you have in Jesus. The baby that was born in a humble stable, endured the cross, and rose again was and is the hope of the world! Jesus was a gift of grace to sinners and that is certainly cause for celebration!

Father, thank you for your love for us and for the hope we have in Christ. Thank you that what started in a manger ended in an empty grave. May we strive to live each day in such a way that our lives are a testimony to the hope we have in Jesus.

The Fulfillment of Hope

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for He will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel.'

Matthew 1:21-23

When I was a kid, I lived for family vacation. I would look forward to it so much that I would become gripped by fear. I was *convinced* something would happen, and we wouldn't be able to go. I would place so much hope in going on the fun vacation that the anticipation would almost overcome me.

For the Israelites, it wasn't a vacation they were hoping for; instead, it was the Messiah who would save Israel. For thousands of years, prophets told God's people that the Messiah would come. But year after year, as they listened to the same message again and again, they began to doubt. It was taking so long that many believed God had forgotten about them, losing hope that the Messiah would ever come.

'But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son.' (Galatians 4:4) God hadn't forgotten about His people. Rather, He was working out every detail perfectly for their good. Then – when the timing was perfect – God sent His Son, who would save His people from their sins. Jesus was the fulfillment of countless years of longing, waiting, and hoping. God kept His promise. But it was so

much better than anyone could imagine. The promise was God Himself! Immanuel had come to be with His people.

Often in life, the things we put our hope in let us down. But Jesus is the proof of God's faithfulness. Jesus is proof that God *always* keeps His promises. For the Israelites, it was the hope that God would send the Messiah. For us, it is the hope that God loves us and cares about the details of our lives. Whatever it may be for you this Christmas season, remember that hope is never lost with God.

~ Pastor BJ

As you continue to celebrate this Christmas season, remember that God has not forgotten about you. Although you may feel as if you are no one to God, your heavenly Father knows exactly what you need when you need it – and He always keeps His promises.

Father, I thank you and praise you that I can trust you and never lose hope in your faithfulness. Help me, every day, to trust in you more than I did the day before.

In the Fullness of Time

In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Galatians 4:3-7

The story of Scripture had played out for centuries and centuries, and then Jesus burst onto the scene. Have you ever wondered why He chose to come when He did? Why not more recently? Or why did He not arrive in the days of King David?

The very first Christmas occurred when it did for one simple reason: it was the time that God had established to send forth His Son. It was not random; it was not accidental; it was not spontaneous. It was God's chosen date to bring about His redemption as He had been planning since The Garden. God had established promises in His Word and was in the process of fulfilling those promises. He had prepared His people for this moment, and the time was right.

For centuries, God had shown his people that their sinfulness was so great that they were incapable of

keeping the law, and that the sacrifices they offered for their sin were not sufficient to meet their need. In that chosen moment—in the fullness of time—Christ offered them something they needed but were unable to provide themselves.

It was for the redemption of mankind that Jesus Christ was born! At the right time, He came to deal with our sin, restore us to a right relationship with God, and adopt us into His family as His children and heirs. Hope came down in the fullness of time and mankind gained redemption!

~ Pastor Monty

God is at work to bring His creation to Himself. He does not act randomly. As you celebrate Christmas, give thanks that God remains in control of His own plan.

Lord, thank you for coming to redeem us at the exact moment we needed you.

The Hope of Christ

She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Luke 2:36b-38

Have you ever had to wait on something that you knew was going to be incredible, but it just wouldn't come? I remember feeling like that about Christmas as a child and, if I'm honest, I still feel that way. I remember how long the days would drag out waiting on Christmas, especially once summer was over and I was back in school. My parents would reassure me that Christmas would eventually come around: *Focus on what you need to do today and eventually you'll turn around and it will be Christmas.* While that wisdom was lost on the 10-year-old version of me, I am passing it on to my children today.

Around the time of Jesus' birth, many Jews were anxiously anticipating a word from the Lord and the advent of One who would deliver them from their circumstances. Anna was a widow and a prophetess at the temple in Jerusalem who devoted her life to praying for that deliverance. She had been faithful in her temple duties for many, many years to the point that Scripture says '*she did not depart from the temple.*' One day while she was in the temple fasting and praying, a young couple came to dedicate their first-born child. When Anna saw this child, she began to

praise God because she understood who she was seeing. She knew that the child she was encountering was the One that she and so many others had been waiting on for so long; it was Him who would bring about the redemption of God's people.

Are you waiting on deliverance? Are you in need of hope? Be like Anna and look on Jesus who is our only Hope. Look to Jesus as the One who once and for all time can deliver you from the weight of sin and give you purpose in life greater than anything you could imagine.

~ Pastor Bruce

As you are walking through uncertainty, be faithful in what God has called you to do as you wait on His timing.

Father, we thank you for your perfect timing in all circumstances. Give us the strength and resolve to be faithful to just put one foot in front of the other while we look to Christ for hope and wait on your timing. Thank you for sending your Son at just the right time so that we could be at peace with you.



Love
Came
Down



For God So Loved the World

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son,
that whoever believes in him should not perish but have
eternal life.*

John 3:16

I have received a lot of gifts during my lifetime: socks, ties, electric trains, vacations, and so much more. Some of them were inexpensive, but some were quite costly. I wear a Rolex watch because of the extravagant generosity of a jeweler friend. I could never have afforded the watch. I sure didn't do anything to deserve it. It was simply the expression of extravagant love.

Oh, how much more extravagant was the love of God when He sent to earth His only Son to provide for my salvation. Did I deserve the gift? No! Could I earn the gift? No! The only contribution I could make was to receive the gift and make it mine.

During this Advent season consider all of the people you know who fail to understand that Jesus truly is *the reason for the season*. They have never grasped the love of God or received the gift of salvation. God has proven His love for us by dying for us.

~ Pastor Ed

Declare your love and appreciation to Jesus by living for Him and celebrating His love. What an amazing gift!

*Father, thank you for sending your Son for my salvation.
I believe in Him as my personal Savior and Lord. Thank
you for your immeasurable gift.*

The Greatest Expression of Love

...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

I still remember the shock when I walked through the door. My wife, Katie, had thrown me a surprise birthday party, and I had *no* clue. Countless friends and family were all gathered to celebrate me, and while I have always felt I have one of the most loving wives around, I struggle to remember a time where I felt more loved than that night.

How people express their love says a lot about them. Many will wax beautifully with words about those they love. Others will give gifts to express their love. You may show your love differently than those described, but have you ever considered how *God* shows His love? He has written poems about us; He even gives us great gifts. But the greatest expression of His love was Him dying, so that we would live.

The greatest expression of love the world has ever seen wasn't in a movie or song, but in a stable and on a cross. It was when God in flesh came to this world and died for us. The reason this is so incredible, as Paul points out, is that Jesus didn't just die for His friends or those who loved Him. Rather, He died for his enemies. He died for sinners... spiritual rebels against Him. Christ did not allow our sin to stop His love. Instead, He chose it to be a way He magnified His love for us, sacrificing himself, even *'while we were still sinners.'*

When the early Christians reflected on Christ's death, they were captured by this truth: *Christ loved me and gave himself for me.* (Galatians 2:20) Christian, the greatest love the world has ever known is a love that was for *you*. God loves *you*! Jesus gave himself up for *you*!

~ Pastor BJ

As you continue to celebrate this Christmas season, delight in the fact that you are loved beyond your wildest dreams.

Father, I praise you for your love for me. I am so undeserving. Thank you for giving up your life, so that I may live.

Because of God's Love

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.

Ephesians 2:4-5

'*But God.*' These two small words—overflowing with the Gospel—succinctly sum up the Lord's divine intervention on our behalf. We were once spiritually dead in our sin and, consequentially, we faced God's wrath with no ability of saving ourselves (Ephesians 2:1-3). We would have been in a hopeless state were it not for the '*but God.*' God intervened and made us alive in Christ.

God would have been fully justified had He left us dead in our sin. We willfully turned from Him and deserved the consequences of our sin. So why did He intervene? What led Him to save those who rebelled against Him? The answer is simply *his love*. He is a merciful, loving God and because of '*the great love with which he loved us,*' he took us from death to life. We may have been saved by God's grace, but it was His love that motivated Him to die in our place for our sins.

I am deeply grateful for God's gift of salvation that brought me from death to life. It is even more meaningful to me that it was given out of His great love.

~ Pastor Darren

God is love. Because He is love, he is also merciful. Because He is merciful, you've been made alive in Christ. Thank God today for His love that has come down to you.

I am grateful to you, Lord, for intervening into my hopeless situation. Had you not loved me with your great love, I would still be spiritually dead in sin. Yet, you did love me, and I am now spiritually alive.

Everlasting Love

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:37-39

My family and I love amusement parks. When we lived in Missouri, we had season passes to Silver Dollar City, an amusement park in Branson. On one occasion we had the opportunity to meet my wife's cousin and his family at the park for the day. Between our two families there were four adults and six kids. Keeping up with the kids was quite the task. At one point in the day we stopped for a restroom break on our way to a ride and our group got separated. As we neared the ride, we discovered that my middle daughter, Savanna, was not with either group. I was immediately consumed with panic and fear because we were separated. I ran back to the restroom and found Savanna standing there just waiting and looking for us. My panic and fear were immediately replaced with peace and gratitude that she was safe. When she discovered we were not there she did exactly what we had told her to do: *stay put and wait for us.*

Today's passage is such an encouragement for the Christ follower. Regardless of the situations we face, persecutions we endure, or painful circumstances we encounter, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Because of the sacrificial love of Christ, we can rest in the promise that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Earlier in Romans 8:28, we read the following passage, *'And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.'* Not only can we rest in the assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of God, we can also cling to the truth that for the Christ follower, God is working everything together for our good. While that may be difficult to see in the midst of a trial or situation, it is a profoundly comforting truth we can each cling to.

~ Pastor Danny

As you continue to journey through this Advent season, look beyond your current trials and struggles and cling to the promise that nothing can separate you from God's love. No medical diagnosis, job loss, financial situation, relationship conflict, or anything else can ever separate you from God's love. Jesus' love for us is everlasting!

Father thank you for your love for us. Thank you that nothing can ever separate me from your love. Please help me to live my life with confidence that you are working everything together for my good and your glory and nothing I will ever encounter can separate me from your love!

The Call to Love

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4:9-11

Have you ever noticed how often we use the word *love*?

'I love a good pizza.'

'I love my town.'

Sometimes we even emphasize it when writing it by using all caps:

'I LOVE {insert sports team name here}.'

'I LOVE {some famous person we have never met}.'

We use the word *love* so often that it has watered down the meaning.

Love from God's perspective is sacrificial. Would I sacrifice for a good pizza? Not really, short of a few dollars that I wouldn't miss. I can certainly think of few things that I love that I absolutely would sacrifice for. Considering how easily I toss the word *love* around, my use of the word does not compare to the unmatched love shown when God sent His only Son.

That God has sacrificially loved us leaves us with a challenge: *we also ought to love one another*. This love for others must reflect the sacrificial love of Christ that

we've received. What could that look like? Will you be challenged to love by sacrificing your time? Will you sacrificially love be giving your money? Will you sacrifice a position or recognition to love someone else? If we are to love one another as God loves us, it cannot only be when it is convenient. Sometimes, it costs.

God's love is sacrificial. His atoning sacrifice for our sins is a clear example of his love at work. We are called to love one another with the same spirit of sacrificial love. None of us have seen God with our eyes, but we can show God's love in how we love each other.

~ Pastor Don

Think about how you love. If you are already loving others in the way God loves you, continue to do so! But if you are someone who loves without sacrifice or only when it is convenient, ask God to help you love like He loves.

God, thank you for the depth in which you love us. Thank you for the challenge to love one another like you have loved us. We pray that we love more deeply and sacrificially and that our love for others be the representation of You to the world.



Joy
Came
Down



The Joy of the Good News

And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.'

Luke 2:10-11

When we have good news, we want to share it. Whether it's a promotion at work, honor roll at school, a sporting achievement, or the birth of a child, we want people to celebrate those significant moments with us. God created us to live in community and to celebrate those moments because he is a God who likes to celebrate in community as well.

As these shepherds were minding their own business and watching their sheep, something amazing happened: the glory of the Lord was surrounding them and an angel appeared to them. It was not your average night out in the pasture. God had good news to share with His creation: His Son was being born! God was so full of joy that he wanted the whole world to know about the Messiah who had just been born. Finally, what was undone by sin was going to be made right. Finally, the fractured relationship with the ones created in His image would be mended. Finally, His people would have direct access to Him again through this Christ. This was good news that filled His heart with joy, and He wanted others to share in it.

What about us today? Do we share in this joy? Do we want everyone around us to know about this Christ who is the Savior of the world?

~ Pastor Bruce

God created us to live in community and to reflect Him in this world. As we think through this passage, let us be joyful about the Savior of the world and tell everyone about it!

Lord, thank you for giving us the hope of salvation through Jesus Christ. Fill our hearts with joy to the point we are compelled to tell others about Him.

The Joy of Salvation

And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.'

Luke 1:46-47

What is your greatest source of joy? Is it found in your marriage, your children, or your grandchildren? New life can bring such joy. Mary experienced immeasurable joy when she gave birth to the Son of God.

Luke 1:46-55 is known as *The Magnificat*. It is Mary's song of joy. Joy came down in the form of a Son and Mary bursts forth into a song of praise. This young virgin girl, carrying a baby conceived by the Holy Spirit, gives birth to the Son of God.

It would not be an easy journey. Mary's husband-to-be nearly abandoned her. Her pregnancy was probably the talk of the town. Yet, when this young lady delivers her baby, she is so filled with joy that she cannot contain her praise. What was the source of her joy? Her joy came down from Heaven in the form of a Savior and her spirit rejoiced.

What Mary experienced was joy, rather than happiness. Happiness is often tied to circumstances, so that when good things happen, you are happy, and when bad things happen, you are sad. Joy is something else entirely. It is a constant sense of well-being that flows when you entrust your life to Christ.

Mary found joy in obedience and surrender to God's divine plan, even when she didn't fully understand it. That joy burst forth in praise when her Son and Savior was born.

~ Pastor Ed

You will never know God's fullness of joy until you embrace that joy that came down from heaven, Jesus Christ.

Father, thank you for sending us the key to joy when you sent us your Son.

When There Was No Joy

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

Matthew 2:3

While it brings great joy to many, not everyone welcomes Christmas. Whereas many look forward to the celebration of Advent, for some it is far from a source of joy. Herod the Great was one who would fit in that category.

Herod the Great was the King of Judea when Jesus was born. Despite his name, he was not a great king. He was a great builder, but he was also a great executioner of those who would threaten his power. When the wise men approached him about worshipping the One who has been born King of the Jews, he did not embrace the news with joy. Instead, he saw a threat that needed to be eliminated. Joy was coming down to mankind, but King Herod wanted nothing of it.

Why could Herod not experience this joy that was coming down to earth? His own selfishness stood in the way. The thought of another king on the scene was more than he could process. Maybe it meant war or a change of plans. Perhaps the people would shift their loyalty to this new king. Determined to not let these things happen, Herod chose being troubled over choosing joy. He chose to look out for his own self-interest instead of God's will.

It is a temptation we all face. Any of us could choose the cares of this world rather than embrace the joy of Christmas. Our attention may be diverted to our most

recent conflict, or that crisis that we just don't have the answer to, or the bill on the table. Regardless, we can choose to focus on the joy that can only be found in Christ, and trust that God is not going to leave us to work out the future on our own. In Christmas, God works out the most important details of our future as He provides redemption that brings the ultimate joy.

~ Pastor Monty

God wants us to surrender to His control, and in doing so, to have the ultimate joy. In our Christmas celebrations, let's choose joy over our troubles.

Lord, thank you for replacing trouble with joy.

Responding to Joy

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'

After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 2:1-2, 9-11

Have you ever been so excited for an event that you could hardly sleep? Maybe you create a countdown and know the exact number of days until the big day. You prepare and you have incredible expectations for how this event will play out. You just know in your heart it is going to be amazing. And then the big day arrives, and it is everything you hoped it would be and more. It exceeds your every expectation!

Now imagine you have seen a rising star in the sky, a sign of a royal birth. Upon seeing the star, the wise men did the only thing they knew to do. They journeyed to find this child to offer gifts that were appropriate for a king

and to worship Him. It is nearly more than my mind can comprehend.

Here's the incredible thing: We have the same opportunity the wise men had. We can offer gifts just like they did. Our gifts will not be that of gold and frankincense and myrrh, but we can give that which is precious to us: our time, our talents, and our treasure. John Piper says it this way, "In a sense, giving gifts to Christ is like fasting – going without something to show that Christ is more valuable than what you are going without." Additionally, we have the incredible privilege of being able to daily worship Jesus, the ultimate source of our hope and joy!

~ Pastor Danny

The holidays can be a very busy time. As you continue to journey through this Advent season, take time to daily worship Jesus. Spend a few moments each day reading the bible and praying. Seek opportunities to offer a gift of your time, talents, and treasure to the Lord.

Father, we love you! We thank you for sending your son, Jesus. Help us to offer you our very best in worship and may the gifts we bring to you be worthy of the One we present them to.

Share the Joy!

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 2:20

My mom passed away a number of years ago, but she was always near, or at, the top of my list of people to share great news with. I would bust at the seams to let her share in some joy I was experiencing. Every now and then, due to the busyness of life, I would wait to call her thinking I would get around to it later. Inevitably, something else would sneak onto the agenda of the day and I would never get the chance to share that news. And then one day, she went home to be with the Lord and I no longer had the opportunity to share life's joy with her.

The shepherds had a front row seat of the Nativity. When they returned home, they took the greatest news in the history of the world with them! The incredible joy that was shared with them over the birth of Jesus, they shared with others. (Luke 2:17)

Imagine another scenario in which the shepherds sat on the news of Christ's birth. Imagine that after they had experienced the Child up close, they went back to their shepherding duties and kept the joy of it all to themselves rather than share it with others. What if they not taken the opportunity to share life's greatest joy with the rest of the world?

You carry the same joyful news. The joy that came down to you is not just for you; it is for everyone. So, share it! While the joy we share is infinite, the opportunities we have to share it are not.

~ Pastor Don

You have an opportunity to share the joy you have found in Christ. Take time today to intentionally share what you've seen and heard about Jesus.

Lord, help us to recognize that the joy we carry is not just for our own enjoyment. Help us to spread joy to all we encounter, even in difficult circumstances. Thank you for the joy of Jesus and remind us of the joy we experienced when we first heard and believed it.



*Peace
Came
Down*



Peace for God's People

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.'

Luke 2:13-14

When God does something, He does it in such a way that only He can get the credit and praise. From the deliverance of His people out of Egypt, to His people being saved from a furnace of fire, to His man being protected through an overnight stay in a den of hungry lions, God repeatedly makes the point that He alone controls the destiny of all things and He will be praised.

As the shepherds were processing the experience and announcement of a messenger from God, they were bombarded with what had to be one of the most extraordinary displays in human history. The entire scene was filled with a multitude of angelic beings singing praises to God and pronouncing peace to the people of God. Not only that, but they gave the encouragement that He was pleased with them. It reminds me of the first chapter of Genesis in which, after every creative event, God saw that *it was good*. In other words, He was pleased with it.

In Luke 2, God is pleased to announce peace to His people, and He does so in a most stunning fashion. This peace cannot be found in governments or any world

system. It can only be found in the One who is the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ.

~ Pastor Bruce

This season, commit yourself to looking at the Prince of Peace as the only source of true stability and peace. Be encouraged: God is pleased with you as He is pleased with the Son in whom you place your hope.

Lord, encourage us with the hope and peace that comes only through your Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus is Our Peace

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace.

Micah 5:2-5a

Have you ever felt like you can't escape the pain and brokenness of life? Natural disasters. Death. Broken relationships. Dashed hopes. Unfulfilled dreams. Hurt feelings. Lost jobs. Cancer. Conflict. So often in life, it seems as if peace – true peace – is absent in the world.

For the Israelites, this was a very familiar feeling. While nations rose up against them and war broke out on every side, they lived in a constant state of hostility. They were small, weak, and without power or authority. Peace evaded them, and they didn't have it within themselves to bring peace into their lives.

In our passage today, we see Micah the prophet sharing the hope of peace that was to come. For a people overlooked, oppressed, and without peace, God was going to bring peace to them, in the form of a new Ruler. He would protect them, give them rest, and lead them with

all authority and power. The Messiah was coming to bring true peace to the people of God.

We often try to acquire peace by our own means. We seek to change our circumstances, or we search for something new in order to move on. Micah's words tell us to do just the opposite. The Ruler who will bring peace in your life, he says, is *'coming forth from of old, from ancient days.'* We will never find peace when we look for a new thing. Peace is found in the God who is from old – the same God who rescued the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, who guided them through the wilderness, who led Esther into power, who raised the dead to life, who caused the deaf to hear and the blind to see. The God who *was* the Ruler over peace still *is* the Ruler to bring you peace.

So, can we know true peace? Absolutely. In the One who is from old – Jesus Christ.

~ Pastor BJ

Sin eradicates peace, but the One who holds power over sin and death can bring you peace with God, peace within yourself, and peace with those around you. As we approach Christmas day, focus your mind and heart on the peace that Christ wants in your life.

Father, thank you for overcoming my sin and bringing true peace into my life. Help me to champion peace, spreading the love and peace of Jesus everywhere I go.

Rest in Peace

Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.

Luke 2:29-32

Rest in Peace is a long-standing liturgical prayer people offer when someone passes away. Simeon, as much as anyone who ever lived, literally rested in peace when he departed this earth. Not only did he rest in peace, he declared to the world in advance that he was doing so. Simeon was a righteous and devout man. The Holy Spirit had previously revealed to Simeon that he would see the Messiah before he died (Luke 2:26). Now, the day had come!

In the moment in which he first saw and held the baby Jesus, he was able to confidently express that he could depart this life in peace, and he based it on God's promise to him! God's promise was reliable, and he could testify to it. He had seen God's salvation and it resulted in Simeon's peace.

Simeon's experience reveals the source of peace. Simeon's peace is found in the salvation God has prepared. This salvation is God's salvation, not man's salvation. God is the designer of it. He is the initiator of it. He is the completer of it. It is God's salvation from beginning to end, and we are simply the recipients!

For Simeon, recognizing that it was all God's doing allowed him to depart this earth in peace. His days were as turbulent as ours. His need was as great as ours. His lack of peace prior to seeing the Christ was as significant as ours. And now, having encountered the Christ child and the promise of salvation He would bring, Simeon could depart this world in peace, having been a participant in God's salvation.

~ Pastor Monty

God provides peace to His creation. Let us recognize His provision and rest in His peace.

Lord, thank you for peace that comes from your salvation.

Down to Earth

Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

Matthew 1:20-21

Does the meaning of your name matter? I only recently discovered the meaning of my name. *Darren* is of Irish origin and means *great*. An alternative meaning, in Old English, is *small, rocky hill*. I'm fairly certain that my parents had the first meaning in mind when they named me rather than the second one!

Names in the Bible carried far greater weight and meaning than they do today. There is no greater example of this than Jesus' name. His earthly father, Joseph, was directed on what to call the Christ child. He was told, *'you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'* Jesus' name is a derivative of the Hebrew name *Joshua*, meaning *God delivers* or *God saves*. Add to that the other name attributed to him in Matthew 1:23, in which He is called *Immanuel (God with us)*. Together, these names describe what the Nativity is all about: God came down to earth to us to save us from our sin.

The name of Jesus matters because His name was His mission. He came down to earth to save you. Without experiencing his forgiveness and salvation personally, you will never truly appreciate what Christmas is all about.

~ Pastor Darren

As we conclude our Christmas celebration, pause to dwell on these names given to our Lord. Think often today of the "why" behind the Advent: God came to save us. If you've not done so already, turn to him for the forgiveness of your sin. Then, live the rest of your life for Him.

Jesus, thank you for living up to your name. Thank you for coming to us to save us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

