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*CHRISTMAS:
A Promise Kept*

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CHRISTMAS: A Promise Kept

"Everything must be fulfilled that is written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

Luke 24:44

"God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as He promised."

Acts 13:23

Introduction



The word *advent* means “to come” or “arrival.” So, through the Advent season we think about the coming of Jesus. Of course, Jesus’ coming and incarnation are not just relevant in December, they are profound truths that are relevant in the summer, too. But the Advent season is a special time to reflect on Jesus Christ.

The word “Christmas” comes from what the day, December 25th, was set apart to do. It was set apart as a “mass on Christ’s day.” That is, Christmas was a day designated to celebrate and contemplate Christ’s coming and why He came.

Christmas is not about the hustle and bustle. It’s really not about red and green, or Santa, or reindeer, or snow. *Christmas* is about *Christ*.

WHAT DOES CHRIST MEAN, AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The word *Christ* comes from New Testament Greek. The Greek word is Χριστός (*Christos*), and it translates the Hebrew word מָשִׁיחַ (Messiah). Great. But what does Christ/Messiah *mean*?

The simple answer is that Messiah means “anointed one.” But there is much more behind the meaning of the word Messiah than just “anointed one.” The Old Testament in various ways and in various writings promises that one would come and fulfill various promises. So, the expectation for the Messiah cannot be captured if we think it simply means “anointed one.” It does mean that. But the definition of the word hardly scratches the surface.

Do you know what a “honey-do-list” is? Have you ever seen one? A “honey-do-list” is a checklist of expectations. I currently have a few things on the list: fix the leaky faucet, refinish the chair, and paint my son’s bedroom. My wife, Leah, gave me a list and expects me to get everything done on that list. I am glad my wife is understanding and gracious, and so the list isn’t very long.

As we think about Christmas, we are looking at a “honey-do-list” of sorts. We are talking about expectations that the Jewish had for the Messiah. We see from Scripture and history that the “honey-do list” was not as small and understanding as my wife’s. They had a huge list.

And different people had different lists, but any list would be difficult to check off... Actually, impossible, unless God was to act in amazing ways.

I think of the messianic expectations like water and oil. You don't expect them to go together. How can the promised one be a king (2 Samuel 7:12-13; 1 Chronicles 17:11-14) and a servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)? "One like the son of man" (Daniel 7:13) and also "Everlasting Father" (Isaiah 9:6)? How could the promised one suffer and die for His people and yet bring an eternal righteous reign? You don't think of those things as going together. But, sometimes things that you wouldn't think go together, work quite nicely.

You wouldn't think oil and vinegar make sense together. And you probably wouldn't initially think it would make sense to have bacon with anything! It's good enough on its own, right? But if you add spinach, candied pecans, cheese, oil, and vinegar (that's been transformed into salad dressing), the bacon is elevated. And maybe even a little healthier.

If unexpected combinations result in delicious food, how great the impact on a spiritual level? A king that is also a servant?! Someone that has all power but is also all good? We don't often think of these combinations, but if they could happen, it would be amazing.

The expectation presented in the Old Testament for the Promised One seems almost impossibly diverse. How could any one person fulfill the many expectations? How could it make sense for the "Ancient of Days" (Daniel 7:9, 13, 22) to be a descendant of king David (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5-6)?

It is as we understand what the expectations were that we better understand and appreciate what Christmas is truly about. In the words of "O' Little Town of Bethlehem," understanding who the Messiah is helps us understand that all "the hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight."

Jesus is the Promised One, the long-awaited Messiah that fulfills all the prophecies and promises regarding Him (2 Corinthians 1:20). He will crush the serpent of old and lead the way back into Eden, He will bless all the nations of the earth, and He will set up His righteous and eternal Kingdom. The baby will grow up to be a man to die for the sins of the world.

"Christmas is not really Christmas if all we are thinking about is a nice little baby. The baby will grow up, and all the violence that the rulers of this world can devise will expend itself upon his broken, bloody, naked body... The shadow of the cross falls across the manger." (Fleming Rutledge, *Advent: The Once and Future Coming of Jesus Christ*, 398-399).

THIS IS CHRISTMAS:

The holy babe in the manger looked not to riches

Nor to fame

But to the cross

To that which He came

This is His purpose

And this His delight

This is what He ever had in His sight

This greatest gift He does bring

Not to the nice who think they keep the law

But to the naughty

To the wretched that on Him do call

He gives the gift of eternal glory where He'll ever be by their side

This is the Gospel

This is Christmas

The Good News of a Savior for sinful humanity

Christmas is about Christ. It's about who He is and what He came to do. The baby whose birthday we celebrate on December 25th is no less than the King, Emmanuel, God with us!

The messianic expectations appeared to be nothing more than unrelated and random shards of glass. But the New Testament helps us see that they were all actually working together to form an astounding, almost unbelievable, stained-glass picture of Jesus, the long-awaited, promised Messiah. That's why understanding what Christ means matters. Because without understanding the expectations for the Messiah, we're left with broken glass, rather than a breathtaking mosaic?

CHRISTMAS AND CHRISTIAN MISSION

We don't often think Christmas is connected to missions, but it is. Let me show you. First, "Christmas" is shorthand for "Christ's mass." The English word "mass" comes from the Latin word *missa*, which means "sent" (the Latin shows up in missions, for example). So, Christmas reminds us that Christ was sent. John 20:21 says, "Jesus said, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you.'"

Jesus was sent to accomplish something. His mission was not just to be a cute little baby. Jesus' mission was to bring salvation. That's actually how He got His name. Matthew clearly spells it out for us: "You shall call His name Jesus, *for* He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). The name Jesus is actually the Greek form of the name Joshua. And it means "Yahweh saves" or "Yahweh is salvation."

So, Jesus was sent on a mission. He accomplished that mission. And we see that now we are sent on a mission. Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, even so *I am sending you*" (John 20:21).

We are sent on a different mission, but in the same way that Jesus was sent, we are sent. We too must carry out the mission. Christians join Christ in the *Missio Dei*, the "mission of God." We are not the good news, but we tell the good news.

Christmas—Christ's mission—should remind us of our mission. Thankfully, it is not our mission alone. Jesus did not leave us alone to accomplish the mission. He Himself is with us to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). And He sent the Holy Spirit to be with us as our Helper (John 16:7-8).

Week 1



In the beginning of the Bible we see God giving instructions and then shortly afterwards we see the breaking of those instructions. So, from the very start we see our need for rescue. God gives His good law to protect us and yet we break it to our devastation. But, even from the beginning, in the same breath that the curse is pronounced, we see the promise of the Christ. We made a way out of God's presence through sin and yet He makes a way for us to come back through the suffering of His Son.

ACTION

Christians often say, "He is the reason for the season," which is true. Yet, it is easy in the "hustle and bustle" of the holidays for that not to ring true in our homes. So, we have compiled suggestions for each week to help you keep Christ central this holiday season.

◆ **Set up a Nativity Scene in your Home**

This is a helpful visual representation of what the holiday season is really all about. The One who created the world—the One who was in the beginning with God—the One who made all things and holds them together—*He* became flesh and dwelt among us. When we see the nativity scene we can rejoice that God waded into this broken world to redeem it.

◆ **Send Christmas Cards with a Spiritual Message**

You don't have to be pushy, but if you are a Christian then "He is the reason for the season." Let that be reflected in your Christmas cards. It can be subtle but I encourage you to think about it. If Jesus is, as the song says, the "hope of all the earth" and the "joy of every longing heart" then let's have at least some of that truth reflected in our *Christmas* greeting cards.

◆ **Write a Christmas card to a Missionary**

Perhaps relate in the note how thankful you are that as Jesus was sent by His Father and went to a place that was not His home and they too were sent by God their Father to a place that is not their original home (cf. Jn. 20:21). Let them know that when you think of Jesus' incarnation you are thankful for their relocation to a land that was foreign to them.

REJOICE

Sing "O Come O Come Emmanuel"

The lyrics might be a little archaic at points but it's worth putting in the work to understand.

***O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.***

"Thou Rod of Jesse" refers to Jesus the Promised One. He is the one who brings us victory from Satan's plots. Thus, we can and should rejoice because Emmanuel (which means "God with us") has come.

DAY 1 // CHRIST JESUS IS THE SEED OF THE WOMAN THAT CRUSHES THE SERPENT

Read

Promise: Genesis 3:15

Fulfillment: Romans 16:20; Hebrews 2:14-18; Revelation 12:9; 20:7-10

Reflect

As Genesis 3:15 predicted, the Messiah’s heel was struck. Jesus died upon the cross. But it was not the deathblow many thought it was because Jesus rose on the third day (Colossians 2:13-15). Rather, Jesus struck a decisive deathblow to Satan. Jesus the Messiah, once and for all, crushes the head of the serpent and sends him to hell (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10). Satan, the serpent of old, is the father of lies who brings death. Jesus is the promised Messiah who brings everlasting and abundant life (John. 10:10).

- ◆ Have you ever thought of Christmas and the defeat of Satan being related? Why or why not?
- ◆ Read Hebrews 2:14-18. What are two of the reasons given why Jesus had to take on flesh?
- ◆ This Christmas season, how can you remember and celebrate the fact that Jesus, the Promised One, will finally and forever defeat Satan?

DAY 2 // CHRIST JESUS IS THE BLESSING TO THE NATIONS

Read

Promise: Genesis 12:1-4

Fulfillment: Galatians 3:7-9; Matthew 28:18-20; Revelation 7:9-11

Reflect

There are many stories about Santa Claus going all around the world with presents. But the ultimate gift to the whole world is the presence of Jesus. He gives blessings to every tribe, language, nation, and tongue. His salvation reaches to the end of the earth (Isaiah 49:6).

- ◆ List out 10 blessings that Jesus has given you.
- ◆ What part has God called you to play in seeing the nations blessed through Jesus, the Christ?
- ◆ Checkout the Crossroads missions partners and find one specific missions partner to pray for this Christmas season as they seek to see the nations blessed through Christ Jesus: crossroadswired.com/global.
- ◆ Listen to or sing "Come, Thou long expected Jesus":

***“hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.”***

DAY 3 // CHRIST JESUS IS THE LAMB OF GOD FOR SINNERS SLAIN

Read

Promise: Exodus 12:21-27

Fulfillment: John 1:29: Revelation 4:9-14

Reflect

Jesus didn't just come to speak the truth and heal. Christ also came as our Passover lamb to be sacrificed (1 Corinthians 5:7). Let that sink in. The Cosmic King of the Universe not only had lambs in His presence at His birth, He came to be a sacrificial lamb, to die in the place of sinners that had spurned His love.

- ◆ Why is it necessary that Jesus die for sins?
- ◆ This Christmas, how can you remember and thank God that Jesus came to be the wrath absorbing sacrifice for our sins?

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[illegible]

DAY 4 // CHRIST JESUS IS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Read

Promise: Leviticus 16

Fulfillment: Hebrews 9:6-28

Reflect

Jesus the Promised One came the first time to take care of sins. He is the lamb without blemish that was sacrificed for our sin. He is the Great High Priest that makes a way for us to go into God's holy presence. He's coming next time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly awaiting His return (Hebrews 9:28).

- ◆ What were some of the roles of the High Priest? How does Jesus fulfill those roles?
- ◆ Why are you thankful that Jesus came to be our High Priest?

- ◆ Why are you thankful that Jesus came to be our High Priest?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

DAY 5 // CHRIST JESUS IS THE STAR OUT OF JACOB

Read

Promise: Numbers 24:17

Fulfillment: Matthew 2:1-12; Revelation 22:16

Reflect

The words “star” and “scepter” from Numbers 24:17 are both symbols of kingship. Jesus Himself is the star and a star (or comet) announced His coming. Interestingly, the sign in the heavens convinced the Babylonian magi—the NASA of the day—to pay a visit to Jesus. They must have been aware of the Jewish promise of a coming King and what was transpiring with the special star made them think something very significant was happening. So, they asked king Herod about the king of the Jews that was to be born.

- ◆ In Matthew 2 we see that the wise men or magi seek out the One who was to be born and then worship Him. What do you think it may have cost the magi in terms of time and money to seek out Jesus?
- ◆ How are *you* seeking and worshiping Jesus?

Week 2



During the time of the prophet Isaiah's ministry (approximately 739-681 B.C.) the people of Israel were split into two kingdoms, the north being the kingdom of Israel and the south being the kingdom of Judah. Wickedness ran rampant and it looked as though both kingdoms would fall spiritually and politically to false gods and the mighty nation of Assyria. The northern kingdom of Israel faced unspeakable turmoil until its collapse under the invasion and occupation of the Assyrian armies in 722 B.C. God was acting in judgment of His chosen people which He had earlier promised as a result of covenant disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

After the fall of the northern kingdom, Judah knew it would not be much longer until they too would meet their demise. Isaiah preached so that his people would be awakened to their sinful condition, return to God, and be reminded that one day, God would restore them to their land and institute kingdom blessings.

The anticipated Messiah of which Isaiah prophesied did not come in their time. In fact Israel would soon begin their fall to foreign occupation, oppression, and face exile for hundreds of years. The house of Jacob was decimated by nation after nation leaving only a remnant. Physical and spiritual darkness fell over the land and the people. Many chose to worship the false idols of their oppressors and turn away from the one true God. God spoke through prophets again and again to urge His people to leave their wicked ways and return to the Lord while simultaneously reminding them that He will be faithful to His promises. After the last prophet Malachi, the people of Israel continued in wickedness. The Lord was silent, no longer speaking to His people through prophets, until 400 years later. The execution of God's plan for redemption, ordained in eternity past, would humbly begin with a child born in a stable and laid in a manger, Immanuel; Christ Jesus, God in flesh.

RESPOND

◆ Reflect on Jesus

Set aside some time by yourself to reflect on why you are thankful that Messiah Jesus came. I encourage you to write your thoughts down. If you enjoy poetry, write a few lines that reflect your thoughts.

◆ Give God a Gift

The notion of giving God a gift may sound funny since it is He that is the "giver of every good gift" (James 1:17 cf. 1 Corinthians 4:7). Yet the Bible certainly gives us precedence for giving God gifts, from Abel's offering (Genesis 4:4) to Paul's exhortation in Romans 12 for each of us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices.

This holiday season give the LORD a gift. No, He does not need it. But He does deserve it and it is thoroughly biblical. When we give gifts to God it gets our mind on God (Matthew 6:21). Here are a few ideas: Fast. Fast one of the holiday feasts. Not for the purpose of limiting your caloric intake but because you want to focus on and intentionally praise the One who is "the reason for the season." You could also give a financial gift to your church or other good ministry. Use your creativity and give a gift that you believe God would appreciate.

REJOICE

Sing "Joy to the World" or "O Holy Night"

*Long lay the world in sin and error pining
'Til he appeared and the soul felt its worth
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices...
Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother
And in His name all oppression shall cease*

DAY 1 // CHRIST JESUS IS THE PROMISED FOREVER KING

Read

Promise: 2 Samuel 7:10-13; 1 Chronicles 17:9-14; Psalm 132:11; Jeremiah 23:5; Isaiah 11:1

Fulfillment: Matthew 1:1; Luke 1:32-33; Revelation 11:15

Reflect

The Lord promised king David a throne, dynasty, and kingdom that would not and could not be fulfilled by a mere man. Rather, God’s promise would be initiated by Jesus Christ in His first advent which made known the divine Messiah, and will be brought to completion in Christ’s second advent. Jesus is the promised descendant of David who fulfills the promise of a throne, dynasty, and kingdom that will not pass away.

- ◆ Reflect on Jesus’s role as King. How is Jesus currently executing His role as King and what responsibility (ies) does that entail? How will Jesus’s role as King change when He comes again?
- ◆ What is your role as a subject in His kingdom and how are you living in it?
- ◆ If you have not already, what steps do you need to take to acknowledge Christ as your King?

DAY 2 // CHRIST JESUS WAS BORN OF A VIRGIN

Read

Promise: Isaiah 7:14

Fulfillment: Matthew 1:23; Luke 1:31

Reflect

In 734 B.C. the southern kingdom of Judah faced an imminent threat of war. King Ahaz of Judah was fearful that he and the royal house would be destroyed. If this was to occur the messianic promise and hope that was earlier given to king David could not be fulfilled. The Lord sent Isaiah to assure king Ahaz that the armies of Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel who conspired against them would not prevail. To confirm this promise, the Lord asked that king Ahaz choose a sign "deep as Sheol or high as heaven" (Isaiah 7:11) but he would not. Despite his refusal, the Lord declared that he would still provide a miraculous sign to the whole house of David. The sign he provided was nothing short of a miracle. A virgin would conceive and bear a son. She would name him Immanuel, which means "God is with us." This sign was bigger than the circumstances of king Ahaz or the kingdom of Judah. The supernatural birth of a child named Immanuel alludes to the child's divine nature. The prophecy of the divine child would ultimately be fulfilled approximately 730 years later on a most holy night in the village of Bethlehem. The virgin Mary would give birth to Jesus Christ from the line of David who is truly "God with us."

- ◆ Do you find it hard to believe that Jesus was born of a virgin? Why or why not?
- ◆ If Jesus is Immanuel—God in flesh—does that make it easier for you to believe that Jesus could be born of a virgin? Why or why not?
- ◆ What aspect of Immanuel—God being with us in Christ Jesus—are you most thankful for?

DAY 3 // CHRIST JESUS IS GOD IN FLESH

Read

Promise: Isaiah 9:1-7

Fulfillment: Matthew 4:12-16; 11:28-29; Luke 2:11; Matthew 28:18; Luke 1:32-33; Revelation 21:3

Reflect

In approximately 733 B.C. the northern kingdom of Israel, specifically the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun, suffered great affliction during the Assyrian invasion and occupation as a punishment for their traitorous activity against Assyria. These areas in the northern kingdom were later annexed in 732 B.C. when they became provinces of king Tiglath-Pileser III. The southern kingdom of Judah looked on in horror as the northern kingdom was ravaged by gloom and darkness, given over to their abominable practices under Assyrian oppression. However, the prophet Isaiah saw a coming period of hope and restoration. He prophesied a royal child would be born who would one day shine upon Naphtali and Zebulun as a light, liberating them from spiritual darkness. The enemy's yoke and rod, their instruments of oppression, would be completely destroyed, freeing those who were once bound. This child would possess the miraculous nature of God wielding a wealth of wisdom that He will provide to His coming kingdom. In this child would the fullness of deity dwell (Colossians 2:9). This child would be the creator of time and the king who would instill eternal peace throughout His kingdom. He would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. This coming child -Immanuel- the divine and royal liberator of whom Isaiah prophesied, would later be born Christ Jesus, God in flesh.

- ◆ Why do you think Jesus needed to be fully God and fully man? What importance did this have for his earthly ministry, death, and resurrection?
 - ◆ One of the names used for Jesus is Wonderful Counselor. How has Jesus provided you with wisdom? How have you applied the wisdom He has provided you?
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DAY 4 // CHRIST JESUS BRINGS A REIGN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Read

Promise: Isaiah 11:1-5

Fulfillment: Matthew 1:1; 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22

Reflect

The Lord had revealed to Isaiah that the mighty nation of Assyria would one day meet destruction by God’s hand (Isaiah 10:24-25) and a remnant would remain from the nearly annihilated house of Jacob. In Isaiah’s prophecy this remnant would resemble a stump, specifically a stump of the royal Davidic line which was named after king David’s father, Jesse. From this stump of Jesse a righteous root would sprout, Immanuel the Messianic King (Isaiah 7:1-16; 9:1-7; 11:1-5). This King’s reign would be unlike any other king of Israel. The Holy Spirit would descend and rest upon Him and He would possess divine characteristics of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2; 9:6). The King would also be completely impartial, judging the world with righteousness. Never before had the world seen a king like the prophesied Root of Jesse whose belt is righteousness and faithfulness (Isaiah 11:5). He is the hope of Israel and the nations. He is the King whose reign will bring everlasting righteousness, peace, and joy. He is Christ Jesus.

- ◆ The Spirit of the Lord had also been with king Saul and king David. Why is it more significant that the Spirit descended on Jesus Christ? When did the Holy Spirit descend on Christ?
- ◆ The world is full of unjust rulers judging with partiality. What do you look forward to most about the righteous reign of Jesus Christ?

DAY 5 // CHRIST JESUS BRINGS THE PROMISE OF RESTORATION

Read

Promise: Isaiah 61:1-4

Fulfillment: Luke 4:18-30

Reflect

Just after the beginning of Christ's ministry He entered the Synagogue at Nazareth on the Sabbath. This was His hometown and He was a renowned teacher, so He was given the scroll of Isaiah to read aloud for those who were gathered. He unrolled the scroll and read a known messianic passage, stopping short of the portion that spoke of the day of the Lord's vengeance (Isaiah 61:1-2a). He sat down to explain the reading and met His fellow Jews with a profound statement, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). Jesus had just claimed to be the Messiah that Israel had been waiting for. He stated that He was the Lord's anointed given the task to carry the good news to the poor and bring about restoration. Those who heard were in awe, and rightfully so, but the wonder with which the Jews had received these sayings quickly wore off and was exchanged with unbelief and anger. They attempted to take Jesus' life by pushing Him off a cliff, however, in an epic messianic fashion He simply walked through the crowd. Jesus did not just claim to be the Messiah, He is the Messiah, therefore no one could take His life; only He could lay it down at the appointed time (John 10:18). Because Jesus is the Messiah, the passage He read from in the scroll of Isaiah was truly fulfilled and supported by His miraculous and restorative works. The first advent of Christ Jesus marked the initial fulfillment for the Lord's promise of complete restoration.

- ◆ People marveled at the gracious words that Jesus said (Luke 4:22). What are three things about Jesus that make you marvel?
 - ◆ How is it that Jesus proclaims "good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18)? How does He "proclaim liberty to the captives" (Luke 4:18)?
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*Long lay the world in sin and error pining
'Til he appeared and the soul felt its worth
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices...
Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother
And in His name all oppression shall cease*

“O Holy Night”



Week 3



On Christmas we celebrate the advent or coming of Christ. The first coming enabled a way for peace to be realized. Humans can, through Christ, have renewed fellowship with God. Yet, as Jesus Himself said, in the world we will have trouble and tribulation (John 16:33).

So, if that's the case, it is implied we will have difficulty and distress, then how can we have perfect peace? In Isaiah chapter 11 we see the, "Pathway to Peace." Isaiah paints a beautiful and powerful picture of peace (Isaiah 11:6-9). A little baby can play with a king cobra without fear (v. 8). How is this possible?

Isaiah 11:9 tells us: the knowledge of God is intimately experienced. And so, nothing will "harm nor destroy on all [the Lord's] holy mountain." Instead of harm, "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

The Messiah will make it so not only the knowledge of the LORD is pervasive but intimacy with the LORD is too. Knowledge in the Old Testament is not merely head knowledge, but it is experiential. How is it that the waters cover the sea? By filling it to the fullness of capacity. God and His goodness will be experienced and known to maximum capacity!

Of course, this is not yet our full reality. First, Christ came as a Lamb to be slain. Next, He's coming as the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5) to bring a reign of eternal peace. "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

RESPOND

◆ Give someone who doesn't deserve it a Gift

In this is love, the Bible says, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His son to be the wrath absorbing sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10). The Bible says that while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). In giving a gift to someone "who doesn't deserve it," we remember the undeserved gift that God has given us.

◆ Go to a Christmas Eve Service

Going to a Christmas Eve service is a blessing and a good way to keep Christ central this Christmas. So, we encourage you to go to a service this year if that's not something you normally do.

◆ Read the Christmas Story on Christmas Day

Reading the Christmas story on Christmas day is good to do especially since the whole season is supposed to be about the coming of the Messiah Jesus. Luke 1:5-2:20 would be a good passage to read. I would also suggest singing a good Christmas song or hymn and offering a prayer of thanks too.

REJOICE

Sing "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus" or "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!

Hail the Sun of Righteousness!

Light and life to all He brings

Risen with healing in His wings

Mild He lays His glory by

Born that man no more may die

Born to raise the sons of earth

Born to give them second birth

DAY 1 // CHRIST JESUS IS THE MIGHTY WARRIOR THAT BRINGS JUSTICE AND PEACE

Read

Promise: Isaiah 63

Fulfillment: Revelation 19:11-21

Reflect

The expectation that many people had for the Messiah was that he would be a warrior that would bring deliverance and freedom from Israel's oppressors. Yet, at the Messiah's first coming, He brought deliverance from sin. What comes next is deliverance from any presence of sinners.

- ◆ Have you ever thought of Christ as a warrior?
- ◆ Peace comes about through the cessation of war and hostility. What are some things that characterize times of war? What about times of peace?
- ◆ When you think about Jesus as a warrior, what about that is difficult? What about it is encouraging?

DAY 2 // CHRIST JESUS WILL BRING PERVASIVE PEACE

Read

Promise: Isaiah 11:6-9

Fulfillment: Romans 8:19-25

Reflect

It is through the Second Advent that pervasive peace comes! So, as we remember Christmas and Jesus' First Coming, we look forward to His Second Coming. As He came, so He will come again! He came incognito, but He will come in power and glory! Maranatha!

- ◆ What are some ways that “creation groans”?
- ◆ What is the point that Isaiah 11:6-8 is making? What is the imagery meant to convey?
- ◆ Scripture says “taste and see that the LORD is good” (Psalm 34:8). When was a time you tasted and experienced the goodness of God? Now imagine fully experiencing the goodness of God as it says in Isaiah 11:9.

[illegible]

DAY 3 // CHRIST JESUS BRINGS IN THE NEW CREATION

Read

Promise: Isaiah 65:17-19

Fulfillment: Revelation 21:1-8

Reflect

At the beginning of the Bible, God’s people were with Him and were unhindered in their enjoyment of God, each other, and the good creation. But then something happened. Humans rebelled and sinned and brought a curse upon God’s beautiful world. Yet, God in His goodness will remake the world and reinhabit it with transformed people that love Him and love others.

- ◆ What is most exciting to you when you think about the new creation?
- ◆ Can you imagine a place without weeping? Can you imagine a world in which death has forever died? Imagine some of the best moments of your life. Now imagine those moments living on forever.
- ◆ How is Christmas connected to the new creation?
- ◆ How do you imagine the new creation? What will it be like?

DAY 4 // CHRIST JESUS ALLOWS A WAY BACK INTO THE FULL PRESENCE OF GOD

Read

Promise: Isaiah 33:20-22; Ezekiel 48:35

Fulfillment: Revelation 21:22-22:5

Reflect

A city “where the LORD is.” That’s the promise. The LORD God–Yahweh–will be in the city. His glory and goodness will be undiluted. How does this connect to Christmas? Well, for one, it is Jesus, the Lamb, who puts names in the “book of life” (Revelation 21:27). No one has access to the blessed city apart from Him (John 14:6).

- ◆ What is the best and most beautiful city you’ve ever visited (other than Mansfield, of course)? What will the city be like that has the LORD, the Father of all goodness in it? That has only transformed loving people in it?
- ◆ Imagine the most stress-free, relaxing place you’ve been. Revelation 21:25 says the “gates will never be shut by day–and there will be no night,” because there will be peace and no stress. If we look forward to vacations, shouldn’t we also look forward to God making this a reality? Just as people mark their calendars for their vacation date, how can you purposely remember and look forward to the eternal “vacation” that is before us?

A Cosmic Christmas

We have seen through our reading over the last weeks that Christmas is bigger than just presents. It's even bigger than the first presence of Jesus. It's also about the previous predictions of His coming and all He came to fulfill. It's also about His Second Coming.

Christmas is about Christ. And Christmas is cosmic in scope. Because of Jesus' coming and Second Coming, the whole world is radically affected. Over the next couple pages, here is a poem that tries to get at the cosmic significance of Christmas.



*Just a word and all wonders wrought,
God announced, and behold, it was all good.*

*Creation had communion with the Creator,
God walked in the Garden.*

*Yet with Adam the serpent did conspire,
and brought the world into mire.*

*Beckoned to the grave,
everything disarranged.*

*The curse burst upon the scene,
but in the midst a seed of hope was seen.*

*Yes, long of old,
the Scriptures told,
of a King who'd come.*

*In His wake,
death shall quake
and the deserts they shall bloom.*

*Yet, many men came and went,
was the hope of promise spent?*

*Many lambs, prophets, priests and kings,
yet none with true salvation in their wings.*

*Darkness for a time,
no prophet's voice was heard.*

*Yet in the darkness,
A light it shone,
and it would overcome the darkness.*

*Behold, O' world, your Prophet,
Priest, and King,*

Jesus the Promised Seed and Lamb

*The curse brought in shall be expunged;
yes, plunged upon the Son.*

*Christ was crushed as promised,
but in His crushing, crushed Satan, sin,
and death.*

*Yes, He was cursed to reverse the curse.
He felt our plight to set all things right.*

*Yes, creation Creator collided
yet we did not hide
for God He brought no wrath,
there was no bloodbath,
the world did not implode or explode
into non-being.*

Instead, angelic greeting:

***“Peace on the earth,
goodwill to men”***

because the Great I AM is come.

Our Lord, Messiah, Savior in a crib.

Wonderful Counselor,

Prince of Peace,

Bright and Morning Star,

born.

*He who lay the foundations of the earth,
laid in a manger.*

*The Infinite born,
a swaddled babe.*

*Yes, He that holds the nations in His hand,
grasps His mother’s hand.*

*He that calls the stars by name,
spoke no name,
nor word.*

He formed Himself in His mother’s womb

*He upheld the nails
that held His hands.*

*He died for you,
for me.*

He became poor

to restore our riches.

*Yes, He felt our plight
to set all things right.*

*He was born to die,
that we might live.*

*The Deity incarnate brings
salvation in His wings.*

*Man once again will be in the Garden
because God’s Son walked from
Gethsemane to Golgotha.*

*No more brier prick or thorn to stick
All shall be made new.*

*When our King all subdue
All shall be made new!*

*All foes to be forgotten
Forever banished soon!*



*Satan's role will be revoked,
the Lord Messiah come.*

*The demons tremble in His wake;
the blind see,
creation glimmers,
soon the groanings cease.*

*This is the time in between,
the already and not yet.
The Kingdom has come, but not
consummated;
it shall be slightly belated.*

*Peace on the earth,
goodwill to man,
God's eternal plan in fruition.*

*The Kingdom has come in God's Son,
the lion to lay down with the lamb.*

*No tent or temple,
for the LORD tabernacled.
Yahweh is Messiah.*

*Yes, Immanuel born,
the balm,
for the vacuum of our souls.*

*Yes, the myth came true in the manger.
God is no longer a stranger,
but makes Himself known in His Son.*

*Jesus, Joshua's namesake, true!
The LORD our Savior come!*

*He was, and is, and is to come.
All things consummate in Him.*

Amen.



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