

GIFTS OF CHRISTMAS

*A CITIZENS CHURCH
ADVENT DEVOTIONAL*

GIFTS OF CHRISTMAS

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“Having been led by the star into the house of Jacob to Emmanuel, the magi showed, by these gifts which they offered, who it was that was worshiped: myrrh, because it was he who should die and be buried for the mortal human race; gold, because he was a king, of whose kingdom is no end; and frankincense, because he was god, who also was made known in Judea, and was declared to those who sought him not.”

ST. IRENAEUS OF LYON

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THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "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." 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" (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Matthew 1:18-25

“The incarnation is the invasion of God himself into the kingdom of darkness, and the sweet baby Jesus sleeping in a manger is the mighty God disguised in weakness, inaugurating his great ambush against Satan and his hideous cohort... A far cry from the typically American approach to the holiday season, but an image worth calling to mind given the times. How would Christmas look different if Christians celebrated it as it truly is: much more like D-day than like a birthday party?”

At the incarnation, God came among us – not to make us feel better or to inspire pretty songs, but to destroy the darkness that oppresses us. Christmas is a divine coupe d'état, overthrowing the ruling powers of this fallen world; God wants his world back, and he himself is coming to get it.”

SARAH CARTER

INTRODUCTION

Following Jesus is a way of life: a means by which we learn to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and then do what Jesus did.

This way of life doesn't come naturally, but it is possible. This process is known as spiritual formation but can go by many names depending on your church background - such as the process of sanctification or the spiritual disciplines.

In addition to practicing personal spiritual formation for thousands of years, the church has also integrated corporate spiritual formation tools and seasons to remind us that we are not alone in our faith; we are a people who follow Jesus together.

One such season in which we can follow Jesus together is the season of Advent.

The purpose of Advent is to prepare our hearts as the people of God to remember and celebrate Jesus' birth and the coming of God's Kingdom to earth through the incarnate Messiah. In the chaos of modern Christmas, Advent is distinctly counter-cultural, and we need practices that force us to slow down, ponder the incarnation, and celebrate the wonder of the first Christmas night.

Historically, the church has done this through observing various practices, such as the lighting of various candles, public readings of Scripture, the Gathering of God's people, and private times of prayer.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL

This advent guide was developed to serve as a daily devotion for you during the weeks leading up to Christmas. We invite you to carve out 15 minutes each morning to spend with God in prayer, letting the Scriptures and questions prompt you into communion with Him.

We recommend the following format:

Relax your Body, Heart, and Mind (2 min)

Sit in a comfortable chair in a quiet place, with your feet firmly on the floor and your palms resting in an open position in your lap. Take 3 deep breaths, and with each one pray a simple prayer “Come, Holy Spirit.” After that, take some time to sit in God’s presence, giving over to Him any distractions or worries that might come to mind.

Read the Passage (5 min)

Next, take a few minutes to slowly read through the passage once or twice. Don’t be afraid to pause at any words that stick out to you.

Reflect on Scripture (7 min)

Take some time to reflect on the prompts provided. Let the questions or statement draw you further into meditation on the text, and further into awe and worship of God.

Close in Prayer (1 min)

Close your time by giving God thanks for this passage and time with Him. Ask Him to help you live for Him as you go about your day.

DEVOTIONAL

*For more resources on spiritual formation and spiritual practices, visit
rhythmsandformation.com.*

DECEMBER 1

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; then 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 5:2-5

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

How have you seen Jesus be a shepherd and strength to you over the past year?

DECEMBER 2

Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:14

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

How is Jesus, the Immanuel (meaning 'God with us') good news for you this Christmas?

DECEMBER 3

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

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

In this passage, Jesus is called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”. Which of these titles brings you the most encouragement right now and why?

DECEMBER 4

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

Isaiah 11:1-5

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

Jesus comes in righteousness, caring for the poor and the humble. How do you need to humble yourself this Christmas to receive the gift of the Messiah?

DECEMBER 5

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Isaiah 11:1-5

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

Jesus comes in righteousness, caring for the poor and the humble. How do you need to humble yourself this Christmas to receive the gift of the Messiah?

DECEMBER 6

A voice cries in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Isaiah 40:3-5

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

Jesus comes embodying and revealing the glory of the Father. He truly is God in flesh. How does gazing at Jesus this Advent season grow your affections for the triune God?

DECEMBER 7

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’

Jeremiah 33:14-16

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

When Jesus comes to earth, He ushers in a Kingdom of Righteousness. What wrongs and injustices in the world are you lamenting this year, and how does the Kingdom of Jesus help you cry out with hope?

DECEMBER 8

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “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.

Matthew 1:18-20

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

When Joseph hears the news about Mary, he is afraid. But the angel calls to Him and tells him “do not fear.” How does the incarnation of Jesus push back your own fear this Advent season?

DECEMBER 9

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

Luke 1:26-29

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

How do you find comfort in God's hand over the Christmas story?

DECEMBER 10

And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

Luke 1:30-34

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

Advent causes us to look back, on the first coming of Jesus, but also forward to His second coming. His Kingdom has no end, the angel tells Mary. How is Christ’s second coming good news to you this advent?

DECEMBER 11

And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:35-38

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

If God is truly God, even something as miraculous as a virgin birth is not too hard for Him. How do you need to deepen your trust of God’s power today?

DECEMBER 12

And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

Luke 1:46-50

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

Mary’s response to the news of the child is rejoicing and worship. “My soul magnifies the Lord” she says. How can you magnify the Lord today and during the rest of Advent?

DECEMBER 13

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” (which means, God with us).

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Matthew 1:21-25

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

Jesus has come to save his people from their sins. Take some time today to rejoice and give God praise for the forgiveness of sins, offered to you through the person and work of Jesus.

DECEMBER 14

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 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.

And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

Luke 2:8-14

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

The multitude of angels praises God for this miraculous birth – “Glory to God in the highest!” Take some time to worship God through prayer or song, for His glory put on display at Christmas.

DECEMBER 15

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Luke 2:15-20

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

When Jesus arrives, the shepherds rush to meet Him. They are willing to abandon their post and do whatever it takes to see the Messiah. What is keeping you right now from full-fledged devotion and pursuit of Jesus?

DECEMBER 16

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."

Matthew 2:3-6

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

When the crowds hear about the Messiah, they are indifferent, unwilling to even go investigate the claims that their long-awaited king has arrived. How do you see indifference towards Jesus in your life right now? How is the Holy Spirit inviting you to repent of these things?

DECEMBER 17

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and 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. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Matthew 2:7-12

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

The Magi, similar to the shepherds, come and offer their gifts before the Lord. They go and worship the Messiah. What "gifts" can you offer Christ Jesus this advent?

DECEMBER 18

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Matthew 2:13-15

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

While some are indifferent to Jesus, some worship Jesus, Herod is opposed to Jesus. How do you see opposition in your heart to Christ or His commands right now? How is the Holy Spirit inviting you to repent of these things?

DECEMBER 19

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John 1:14

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

The Word became flesh. Jesus has entered into humanity. Take some time to sit and ponder this good news and let it encourage and uplift your soul.

DECEMBER 20

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

Hebrews 1:1-2

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

God has spoken to us through His Son. As you read about the life of Jesus in the gospels, what is that saying to you about God, His world, and His work in your life?

DECEMBER 21

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

1 Timothy 1:15-17

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

Christ came to save sinners! Take some time to reflect on Christ, both the cradle and the cross. Write down some prayers of thanksgiving for what Christ has done to save you.

DECEMBER 22

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

Philippians 2:5-7

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

Christ coming to earth was the ultimate act of self-denial and self-sacrifice. How does His sacrifice empower you to sacrifice for others this advent?

DECEMBER 23

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Titus 3:4-7

What is the Holy Spirit showing you in these verses about Jesus?

Christ appeared to save us and sanctify us. How have you seen God use this advent season to make you more like Jesus?

DECEMBER 24

Take some time this Christmas Eve to read and reflect on the Christmas story from either Matthew 1-2 or Luke 1-2

CANDLE LIGHTING LITURGY

We would encourage you to use this time on Christmas Eve to reflect on the candles we have been lighting during the Advent season. You can do this liturgy with roommates, friends, and/or family.

(Note: advent candle and wreaths sets are available on Amazon for <\$15 and will help with this guided liturgy as well.)

THE HOPE CANDLE

Light the first candle, then follow the liturgy out loud.

Leader:

The first candle we light today is the hope candle. For thousands of years, God's people waited with hope for the arrival of the Messiah.

All:

Come, Lord Jesus. Even as we celebrate your first coming, we wait with hope for your second coming.

Leader:

Christ has come, and Christ will come again.

THE PEACE CANDLE

Light the second candle, then follow the liturgy out loud.

Leader:

The second candle is the peace candle. Christ has come bringing peace.

All:

As we celebrate Christ's coming, we say with the angels: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased."

Leader:

Christ has come, and Christ will come again.

THE JOY CANDLE

Light the third candle, then follow the liturgy out loud.

Leader:

The third candle is the joy candle. This season is a season of joy!

All:

Though this year may have been marked with sorrow, Christmas turns our hearts once again to rejoicing in God.

Leader:

Christ has come, and Christ will come again.

THE LOVE CANDLE

Light the fourth candle, then follow the liturgy out loud.

Leader:

The fourth candle is the love candle. Christ coming into the world was the greatest act of sacrificial love humanity has ever seen.

All:

The cradle and the cross are proof God loves us. He is faithful to His people through centuries and generations.

Leader:

Christ has come, and Christ will come again.

Leader

(adapted from Sally Lloyd Jones, *Jesus Storybook Bible*):

Now, Mary and Joseph had to take a trip to Bethlehem, the town King David was from. But when they reached the little town, they found every room was full. Every bed was taken. “Go away!” the innkeepers told them. “There isn’t any palce for you.” Where would they stay? Soon Mary’s baby would come.

They couldn’t find anywhere except an old, worn down stable. So they stayed where the cows and the donkeys and the horses stayed. And there, in the stable, amongst the chickens and the donkeys and the cows, in the quiet of the night, God gave the world his beautiful gift.

The baby that would change the world was born. Mary and Joseph wrapped him up to keep him warm. They made a soft bed of straw and used the animals’ feeding trough as the cradle. And they gazed in wonder at God’s great gift, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger. Mary and Joseph named him Jesus, Emmauel – which means “God has come to live with us.”

Because, of course, he had.

THE CHRIST CANDLE

Light the middle and fifth candle, then follow the liturgy out loud.

Leader:

The final candle is the Christ candle. Christ has come into the world.

All:

Christ has come, and Christ will come again.

Close in prayer.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BOOKS

The Christmas We Didn't Expect by David Matthis

Repeat the Sounding Joy by Christopher Ash

The Dawn of Redeeming Grace by Sinclair Ferguson

MUSIC

Joy Has Dawned by Kings (MHM)

Repeat the Sounding Joy by Citizens

Lowborn King by Modern Post

Sing! An Irish Christmas by Keith & Kristyn Getty

