

*Hearts in
Preparation:
An Advent
Journey*



*A 30-day Journey of Inspiration
November 25th through December 24th*

Hearts in Preparation: An Advent Journey is designed to help us understand a little better the journey that Mary and Joseph experienced during their 30-day walk from Nazareth to Bethlehem to fulfill Ceaser's requirement to be taxed and to fulfill Scripture that Messiah should be born in Bethlehem.

My prayer is that these devotional thoughts strengthen your own spiritual growth as you experience some Reflections on a journey to Bethlehem.

All Scripture quotations are from the Christian Standard Bible.

In Christ,
Joseph W. Scull, III

Day 1 – 25 November**Matthew 1:1-7**The Genealogy of Jesus

Ancestry or family lines are very important in Middle Eastern families. It is important for especially a male to know who his father is. Also, the term father can be related many generations backward. For example, we often see in the New Testament the Jews referring to “Father” Abraham. So, when Jesus is referenced as son of David although Jesus is not the literal son of David because he is an heir, David is his father.

Matthew understood this concept and set out to tell us about Jesus’ ancestry. Matthew tells us about the kings and prophets in Jesus’ line. Why? Because the Messiah had to be born in a kingly line which is why Matthew’s gospel is focused on the “kingdom.” All the information recorded is to point us to Jesus as King. Jesus receives that legal authority from Joseph, as Joseph is a son of David.

As we begin this 30-day journey we can focus on Jesus as our eternal king as we too will rule and reign with Him in the future. Imagine what it will be like to be in the presence of the KING of Kings all the time.

Day 2 – 26 November**Luke 1:26-27**Nazareth of Galilee

Nazareth of Galilee, what do we know about this little town in Israel? History tells us it was a little hamlet, of about 400 people. The town itself was set in the basin between surrounding hills and not easily accessible. It was also a town known for its rough reputation. This is the town from

which Joseph and Mary would come. It is the town where the angels speak to both Mary and Joseph, To Mary that she would conceive and bear a child as a virgin. To Joseph he should take Mary as his wife and not fear because the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

This is the season to remember that God is our provider. Just as He provided for Mary and Joseph during those trying days, He will provide for us in good times and bad.

During these days of celebration with family, food, and even work remember God will take care of you.

Day 3 – 27 November

Luke 1:26-29

Gabriel

Have you ever encountered an Angel? There were several in the Old Testament who had. Daniel for one. In Daniel chapter 8 an angel revealed to him events to come. In chapter 9, Gabriel comes to give Daniel insight and understanding.

Gabriel once again shows up in Luke 1, and speaks to Zachariah. He comes to bring him good news, that he and his elderly wife will have a son. Zachariah and Elizabeth were without any children, so this truly would be good news. Gabriel goes on to state that his son's name will be John, a forerunner of the Messiah.

Can you imagine how frightened Daniel, Mary, and Joseph must have been on that first encounter with Gabriel? Now remember Gabriel's response to Mary, "You are highly favored." Mary must have known something of the Scriptures. Mary responds with some confidence by saying "Let it be done."

Day 4 – 28 November

Luke 1:31-33

The God of Promise

About 1,000 years before the angel came to Mary to announce that she was chosen by God to be the mother of the Savior a little shepherd boy was chosen by God to be the next king of Israel. David was a righteous king, a man after God's own heart and yet he made many mistakes. But David was one who would seek after God's will and wanted to deeply know God. As a result, God promised him that his seed would always rule over Israel.

Not only did David cling to this promise but the nation of Israel itself held fast to it. *Isaiah 9:6-7 CSB* "For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ The dominion will be vast, and its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever. The zeal of the Lord of Armies will accomplish this."

God did not forsake His servant David, the people of Israel, or a world desperately in need of redemption.

In a poor backwoods, insignificant town with a terrible reputation, an angel appeared to another servant seeking God's will and wanting to know Him. There God fulfilled His promise in a young girl, a young girl who told the angel "I am the Lord's servant. Let everything you've said happen to me." Even though she may not have completely understood what was about to take place, she simply trusted in God to provide a savior for all mankind.

1 John 1:9 CSB “God is faithful and reliable. If we confess our sins, he forgives them and cleanses us from everything we’ve done wrong.”

Day 5 – 29 November

Luke 1:38

YES!

One of the words that we frequently use is yes. We say it to our children, we say it to employers, we even say it to church leaders. There is something about saying yes that brings a sense of satisfaction, fulfillment.

However, when it come to our relationship with God, we often find it difficult to say yes to Him and His will. He is the one who created us, *Acts 17:28 CSB “Certainly, we live, move, and exist because of him. As some of your poets have said, ‘We are God’s children.’”*

Mary listened to the angel share that God chose her, her a young girl from a small town, to be the Mother of His son. The angel told her not to fear. Fear what did she have to fear? A single pregnant girl, the ridicule she would get, the rejection and even possible death. And in all of this Mary told the angel *“I am the Lord’s servant. Let everything you’ve said happen to me.”* Talk about submission to someone else’s will.

This is what God is looking for, for each of us to simply say yes. To trust Him for all that come our way by saying yes. We can be like Mary and respond “be it according to your will.” Jesus said yes to coming to earth, enrobing himself in human form so that He could redeem us from our sins. That is the ultimate yes.

Day 6 – 30 November

Matthew 1:22-23

Emmanuel

It has not always been the case, however for the past several years I cannot get enough Christmas. If you walk into my office, many days of the week no matter what month you are likely to hear Christmas music playing. When I decorate the house, I often leave the decorations up all year or until my wife decides they need to come down. Christmas is undoubtedly my favorite time of year. There is just something about Christmas – the peace that comes with it. Oh, I know there is the hustle and bustle to do shopping and even the occasional fighting in the stores, and yet there is a unexplainable peace,

Thinking over my life I can distinctly recall several times that “*Emmanuel*” was present even if I didn’t know it at the time. Three times in my life I have been saved from death when otherwise I should have died. There are other times in my life when “*Emmanuel*” was present as a comforter and guide.

Sometimes I think how great it would be to have witnessed His birth in Bethlehem and then I am reminded that there is coming a witnessing with my savior, the time I will be able to see Him face to face in glory.

Praise God for “*Emmanuel*” – God with us! I know He is with me.

Day 7 – 1 December

Matthew 1:21

Whose I am

In 2018 Hillsong came out with a song entitled “Who You Say I am” look at the chorus: “*I am chosen, not forsaken I am who You say I am You are for me, not against me I am who You say I am.*” Think about that for a minute. Often you hear phrases like “Who you think you are?” or “Who’s your people?” or even something else that is similar. Are you one who belongs to the KING of Kings?

Roman occupation! Religious corruption! 400 + years without hearing a word from God. The darkness had invaded, spiritual relationships with God were almost non-existent. Demon oppression, disabilities, disease, sickness, and, to make things worse national identity was trampled upon. This is the world that Emmanuel would be born into.

The light of the angel startled Mary; she was baffled as this angelic messenger brought the news; she would be the mother of the Messiah. The one who is called “Jesus” – He will save. The one who will break the power of sin and its destruction. The one who would carry the burden of His people. Jesus – He would save His people from their sins.

In Matthew 12 Jesus asks “*Who is my mother and who are my brothers?*”

But then He goes on to say who are His family? - CSB⁴⁹ *Stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”* This implies that those who have come to faith in Him are His family.

So, the question remains, “Who are you?” Do you belong to Christ, have you come to Him in faith asking Him to save? For me, “Whose am I – I am a child of the King.

Day 8 – 2 December

Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:6

90 Miles of Bad Road

Be honest, none of us likes the infamous signs while we are traveling the road “construction ahead.” Somehow those zones, although needed to maintain the roads always make the trip that much longer and wearisome.

The ninety-mile journey from Nazareth in the north to Bethlehem in the south was one full of “construction zones” so to speak. The trip would be

on dangerous rough roads, it would be physically demanding, especially for a woman nine months pregnant, full of up one mountain and down another, and do not forget about the consistent threat of thieves and robbers.

I am sure if Joseph and Mary could speak with us today, they would tell us that they never regretted the trip. This is faith on display. They both had angel visits and were told they would be the parents of the Messiah. If God said it that settled it for them. It was God's job to see that they got where they needed to go, not theirs, all they had to do is to obey.

To Bethlehem, City of David – The House of Bread so that the Bread of Life could be born. And then make His own “Ninety-Mile Journey” from Pilate's judgement seat down the Via Dolorosa to the cross where He died for the sins of the world.

As we walk this pilgrim road, it can be both physically and spiritually demanding. Focus on the Father asking Him to give you the mental, physical, and even spiritual strength you need to carry out His will.

Day 9 – 3 December

Matthew 13:54-55

The Carpenter's Son

Approaching the day, we set aside to celebrate our Savior's birth, we often think of the familiar passages; angels appearing to both Joseph and Mary, the shepherds in the field, the wise men. All of these are true and enduring. Yet, they all have one thing in common: they focus only on one side of the Christmas story. Today's passage deals with another side.

Matthew records for us an incident that occurred early in the ministry of Christ as he visits his hometown, Nazareth. Now remember Nazareth is not a town with a good reputation. It is there that Christ begins to reveal that He is Messiah, God incarnate.

But notice an important phrase used by the people of Nazareth, “*Isn’t this the carpenter’s son?*” Although it seems like a question but it really is a slam, a cut, a rebuke. It is a statement of unbelief. A statement of rejection. Isaiah 53:3 reminds us, CSB “*He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like someone people turned away from; he was despised, and we didn’t value him.*” Isaiah tells us about the Savior and one way to recognize Him – his rejection by men.

This season Christmas isn’t just about a cute story of angels, a baby, or shepherds in some obscure small town in northern Israel, it is about GOD who put on human flesh to live among us to be rejected by us and yet die one of the most horrible deaths known to man because He loved us and wants to redeem us from our sins.

Let’s stop rejecting Him. He still loves and wants a personal relationship with us.

Day 10 – 4 December

Matthew 1:18-21

Doubts Arise

Mary having just learned that she has been chosen by God to be the mother of the Messiah by the Holy Spirit now must share this news with her family and her betrothed husband Joseph. Can you imagine Mary’s fear of embarrassment, ridicule? How would she explain this pregnancy to her soon-to-be husband Joseph?

As we see in the story Joseph initially had doubts, and I believe disappointment. Joseph being a righteous man sought to quietly divorce her and not publicly accuse her which would demand her death by stoning. And, yet with this action there must have been some inkling of faith in Mary on Joseph's part. That night an angel visits Joseph and tells him that that Mary has shared is true, and Mary has not been unfaithful, to take her as his wife, to raise the "Son of God."

There is a scene in the movie "*The Nativity*" which speaks volumes. As Joseph and Mary are traveling to Bethlehem, they are sitting and having a meal talking about this wonderful opportunity they have. Joseph tells Mary "I wonder if I will be able to teach Him anything."

Doubts, we all have them from time to time. Let's take a lesson from Joseph here and allow God to take our doubts and replace them with courage to do what God has asked us to do.

Day 11 – 5 December

Matthew 1:18-19

What are you listening to?

As I am writing this, I am reminded of the 48 years that my wife and I are celebrating this year. In those years one of the most important lessons, I have learned is to listen to what she says! I have found that she has a real sense about what God is doing or wants to do in our lives. I will say that the more I have listened to her the more trouble I seem to stay out of.

Joseph, the espoused husband of Mary, was as Scripture says a righteous man. He followed the Laws of Moses as best he could. Unfortunately, following the Laws of Moses at this point could have had devastating effects for the entire world. If he strictly followed the Laws, it meant the death of Mary. After all, according to those Laws it was his right to have her put to death.

But God. Don't you love those words, "But God"? At the right time, not early, not late, but at the right time the angel shows up with a message for Joseph to take Mary as wife and not be afraid. Now, Joseph had a choice – does he listen to the Laws of Moses or to the angel's message?

Praise to God he chose to listen to Gabriel's message. Which begs the question: "Who are we listening to?" We too have a choice – we can listen to the world's philosophies, or we can listen to God's message. Which will it be? Following God is never easy, but He has promised to give us what we need to carry out His will. Let's listen to the voice of God as He speaks today.

Day 12 – 6 December

Matthew 1:20

Dream, Dream

A Devote man named Joseph had a dream. As we look throughout the Scripture, we see that God often uses dreams to communicate messages to His people. Abimelech was given a dream not to defile Sarah the wife of Abraham, Pharaoh had a dream that Joseph (Genesis Joseph) interpreted that saved Israel, God appeared to Solomon in a dream asking Solomon what He should give him, and Nebuchadnezzar had dream of a statue that Daniel interpreted to again save Israel. Dreams are important.

In today's passage Joseph's dream is extremely important as the fate of mankind rests upon what Joseph. Joseph is good Galilean fashion and is preparing for a wedding, which would be a week-long celebration, Joseph would be building a room on his father's house so that he and Mary could live there. It is during this time that Mary is visited by the angel informing she will be pregnant with God's Son through the Holy Spirit. Then the surprise! Mary shows up pregnant and Joseph's dreams seem to be smashed.

God in His compassion understands Joseph's confusion and frustrations and send him a dream to reassure him that all is well. The child in Mary's womb is the long-awaited Messiah and he should have no fears of taking her for his wife. Can you imagine Joseph at this point, humbleness, honor, and probably uncertainty as to how all will work out.

Knowledge of God's Word, which is why we need to be in it, will always carry us through any dilemma we may face and add to the excitement that comes our way as well.

Day 13 – 7 December

Matthew 1:24-25

[Just Do it!](#)

Joseph, anticipating the great day when he takes Mary to be his lawfully wedded wife. Joseph got more than he planned for. Wow! Think of how he must have felt. Mary, the chosen vessel of God to be the mother of the Messiah was now going to his wife, what an honor. We honor Mary for her commitment to follow God's will, but Joseph too was an honored servant. He not only has to care for his new wife but an especially significant one. Joseph, I am sure, had no idea how his life was about to change.

Isaiah reminds us *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways.” This is the Lord's declaration.* ⁹ *“For as heaven is higher than earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”* CSB

Joseph was tasked with raising God's Son, the savior of the world. And, He did it. We don't know a lot about the early years of Jesus' life and Joseph's interactions with him but do see the faithfulness of Joseph to carry out God's plan.

Sometimes the easiest way is to simply “just do it” when comes to God’s will. Most of His will is not mysterious and hard to find, actually most of God’s will is clearly revealed in His Word.

Let’s read it and just do it.

Day 14 – 8 December

Luke 1:39-45

Surprise!

Pregnancies today carry much hoopla, there are all kinds of ways people choose to reveal the gender of the child within the womb. Sometimes that are hilarious and other times not so much. But everyone wants to know whether it is a boy or a girl. Either way the couple is choosing to share their joy with those they are close to.

Rick Warren in his book, “The Purpose Driven Life,” says “Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation.”

In our passage today we can see that assurance – Mary and Elizabeth stand before one another, filled with excitement, and joy. There is no fear, there is a firm knowledge is that God is indeed in control and they celebrate the coming birth of the Messiah. Listen to Elizabeth’s words, “*blessed are you among women, and your child will be blessed!... Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill what he has spoken to her!*” CSB

As we continue through the Advent season, let us be surprised by what God will bring about and cast all of our worries aside as Mary and Elizabeth did and rest in His leading and guiding.

Day 15 – 9 December**Luke 1:46-47**Mary's Song

The hope of every girl in ancient Israel who was in the line of David to be the mother of the Messiah, which is why when a woman was barren it was seen as a curse. Then when Mary is told by the angel that she, she would be the mother of the Messiah it was a dream come true. Wow! This is where we find Mary, in a moment of exuberating, of excitement, of praising her God and her savior. Mary taking in all that has happened, the angelic announcement to her, the angelic visitation to Joseph, Elizabeth's confirmation brought extreme joy to her heart now.

So, what does Mary do? She breaks into a song of praise “...*My soul praises the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior.*” CSB. Mary's soul, mind, emotions and spirit are joined together for a moment of pure praise and worship. She is at perfect peace and harmony with the plan of God and her response can be no other than to rejoice and sing.

May this Christmas be a time of our soul, mind, emotions and spirit be joined together and burst forth in song at the birth of our savior.

Day 16 – 10 December**Luke 1:48-53**Rejoice!

Day we continue with the spirit of rejoicing. Take some time to mediate on Mary's on the words of Mary's song, her spirit of humility, that she understood future generations would relish this day, God's mercy, He is

the Almighty one, His justice, His blessings to those that seek Him, and others that she mentions. In the Old Testament we frequently see the word LORD or GOD all in capitals, that is the word we say in English Jehovah and often we LORD God which would be Jehovah the Almighty one. How cool is that. This is the time to remember that Jehovah has indeed mighty works that no other could do. Praise to His Holy name.

Whatever you are doing today, wherever you may be find time to simply rejoice, rejoice that God is in control, and has promised to “never leave nor forsake” us. Amen

Day 17 – 11 December

Luke 1:56

The Women

As we come to our passage today, I am thinking about the important women who have been in my life and how they have impacted it. We all have those individuals we deem important because of advice, comfort or even encouragement they have given. They are mothers, sisters, or even co-workers but they play an important role.

Today I want to focus on the two women who are front and center of the Nativity story, Elizabeth and Mary. Elizabeth, a woman advanced in years and without child, a righteous woman, married to Zachariah, a priest. An angel appears to Zachariah while he carrying out his priestly duties, which probably was a once in a lifetime event for him. Zachariah, you will have a son and will call him John, he will be the forerunner, he will go before the people of Israel to prepare the way for the Messiah – Jesus. In his doubting he was struck mute until the child was born. Yet the angels’ word proved true as Elizabeth in her old age becomes pregnant and in her seclusion for the next five months sets about praising the Lord for His mercy and favor.

Mary, we don't know much about Mary. We do know she was betrothed to a man named Joseph, they lived in a town on upper Galilee called Nazareth which was known for being a "hideout" town for thieves and robbers. We know she is a virgin and that she is a righteous young woman most likely in her early teen years. We also know that Gabriel visits her to inform her she has been chosen to bear the Messiah. She also told that her cousin Elizabeth will bear a child in her old age. Mary's response is not so much disbelief but rather seeking understanding as to how all of this will come about. Her words "*I am the Lord's servant...may it be done to me according to your word*" CSB, demonstrate her faith.

Mary then rushes off to visit Elizabeth, why? No specific reason is given but let me speculate for a minute. I think Mary goes to Elizabeth for a couple of reasons: 1) I think Mary goes to make sure that she is not dreaming, she goes for confirmation that what the angel told her was indeed genuine. 2) I think she goes to be encouraged, the younger to the older. Mary is basically just starting life where as Elizabeth is nearing the end of hers, she is looking for wisdom. And third I think she goes to just draw away from her town and surrounding to meditate on all that has taken place and what is about to take place in the next nine months.

So, who are the important women in your life. These two women demonstrate for us faith and trust in God's word and the need to encourage one another. Let's be that today a person of encouragement in a world filled with discouraging things.

Day 18 – 12 December

Luke 2:3-4

Obedience

Ever need someone to come alongside and help? Of course, you did and do. Remember those times when there seemed no possible solution and then someone else came along side and pitch in to help and the problem

was resolved. God does call us to difficult and hard things but He also provides for us what we need to accomplish the task.

The ninety-mile trek to Bethlehem from Nazareth would be a difficult one. It would cost effort, money, and time. The trip would be about a four-day trip, averaging about twenty plus miles a day on foot. Joseph was not only taking himself, but Mary who was “great” with child. In the Biblical account there is no donkey mentioned, so either way, Mary walking or riding a donkey this would not be an easy venture. But Joseph knew what he had to do, by Roman decree he had to register in Bethlehem and he set out to do it.

That makes me think about our own spiritual journey. And that is the point it is a journey, a trek not a single moment in life but an entire life. Along that journey there will be people that we will need to help, people that will help us too. They will need words of encouragement, words rebuke, and at time words of warning done in love. I have found over the years that most people when they have a problem just need someone to listen, to hear them out.

Let’s determine to be like Joseph, to one who will first obey and then help those that Christ place in our path along the journey.

Day 19 – 13 December

Luke 2:1-5

The Great Journey

When we were in Colorado in my second pastorate my sister and her husband came out for a visit. Which was a good time. While there we decide that we would make the 600 + mile journey to the Grand Canyon. A mere 10 and half hour drive if all went well. Oh, I forgot to mention that at the time my wife 9 months pregnant with our second child. So, against the advice of her doctor off we went. They had a pickup with a

camper top and we packed up, made a “bed” for her to lay on and made the trip, with many frequent bathroom breaks. There and back God protected and safety returned us home. The scenery was awesome and the Grand Canyon just a big hole in the ground, seriously it too was awesome.

As arduous as our journey was, I can only imagine how hard it was for Mary and Joseph. Traveling 10 hours on a bed in the back of truck is one thing, but traveling ninety miles on foot and being nine months pregnant is a whole another story. How patient Joseph must have been for those frequent “pit stops.” The normal average time would have been about four days to complete the trip to Bethlehem, I am sure it took longer. Even if Mary was on a donkey, which is not mentioned, it had to be hard oh her, and I imagine a complaint or two was uttered. Yet, Joseph was gracious enough to help and fulfill the mission.

For you and I the journey we are on will be difficult and hard at times, and I am sure a complaint or two being uttered. Take encouragement though the journey is not impossible, for with God all things are possible. Let’s finish the mission with graciousness in the midst of difficulty.

Day 20 – 15 December

Luke 2:6-7

What! No Room!

The holidays, that time between Reformation Day (30 October) and Christmas (25 December) is filled with excitement, decorations, family and food. Ah! The smells. Who does not love the smell of a cinnamon pumpkin spice candle burning, or a good whiff of evergreen hanging in the air. Many of our homes do not have designated guest rooms, usually of our homes are just adequate to house our own immediate families. So, when someone extra shows up for the night, we break out the air mattress and place it in the “office” area from them to spend the night.

When we travel, we usually look for a good motel to stay the night. Joseph and Mary traveling to Bethlehem did not check with MapQuest to see what hotels or motels were available to stay in, they more than likely were depending on a family member to have a room for them to stay in. Now because of the Roman Decree to be counted I envision every home in Bethlehem to be packed to capacity, aunts, uncles, cousins and other relatives crammed into the small homes of Bethlehem. I also envision Joseph and Mary arriving in time for that census yet at the same time late in the game so to speak because of her being great with child. Thus, leaving Joseph and Mary to fend for themselves for a room. The Inn Keeper gets a bad rap in the story, we make him out to be some kind of villain, remember the Roman census brought dozens of people to town, it was simply a matter of logistics, there literally was no room for anymore.

But there was that stable, a stable a place where animals were kept. This not a barn as we know it, nor a nice looking creche that we place on our mantles but rather more than likely a simple out cropping in the rock face, a place just deep enough where animals could be placed for safety. There in this meager setting in a feeding bin was born the KING of Kings, LORD Almighty. No fanfare, no applause, no announcements in the local paper.

In this uncrowded scene there is a reminder for all of us to unclutter our own hearts and minds. The decorations and festivities are fine and worth celebrating but let's be like the other Mary, sister of Martha and choose not only to participate in the season but to sit at the feet of the Savior for whom we created these celebrations.

Day 21 – 16 December

Luke 2:8

[Shepherds?](#)

Luke 2:8 *“In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock.”* CSB

Did you ever wonder why shepherds are used as an announcement for the birth of the Messiah? I mean really shepherds? Understand who shepherds were in the 1st century. They are the “outcasts” of society in essence. They stink and they were often not the most trustworthy individuals. They are from the lower portion of society. At the same time although considered unimportant they were in charge of a very important task, raising the sacrificial lambs. And, yet these are the ones the Angels came to, to declare that the Messiah had been born. Here these shepherds are out in the field watching over lambs that probably will be used in sacrifices at the temple, far enough away from the temple as to not cause issues and yet close enough to obtain when needed.

So, who does the Jehovah turn to when He wants to announce the birth of His Son, the Messiah? The outcasts of society, the unimportant, the low-life’s if you will. What a message for us. Messiah is for all not just the high and mighty but the lowly of society. Those who understand that they are in need of redemption. Shepherds knew their position; they knew they were sinners in need of help. The Herod’s do not understand their need and see themselves as not needing God at all. Jesus, Himself tells the Pharisees that He came to the sick because the sick know they need the physician.

Today, let’s us be like the shepherds, knowing we are sick, we need a physician, we are SINNERS in great need of redemption. This announcement is for us, for me. Today in the town of Bethlehem is born a Messiah for me and you. Halleluiah! What a Savior!

Day 22 – 17 December

Luke 2:8-11

[The Message](#)

Picture it, a dark cool night, stars fill the sky, the sound of crickets and occasional howls of wolves and other animals along with the bleating of sheep while you huddled around a small fire trying to stay warm. The shepherd's normal routine at this time of year.

Then, BAM! Suddenly the dark night became brilliantly aglow and a host of angels appeared. By the way the word for host refers to an army not a choir. Picture it, dozens of angels armored with blazing swords dressed in heavenly armor, is there any wonder the shepherds were terrified causing the angels to say, "Fear not!"

Scripture reminds us in Hebrews 13 "*Let brotherly love continue. ² Don't neglect to show hospitality, for by doing this some have welcomed angels as guests without knowing it.*" CSB that angels are walking among us. My wife and I an encounter with a stranger a couple of years back while traveling. We stopped at a restaurant to get a quick bite and this stranger walks up to me and says he knows me. My wife and I looked at him puzzled and apologized for not knowing him. Then he told me he had friends in Pennsylvania where we were going too. The conversion led to some things that he really should not have known. We parted cordially and my wife I discussed the incident and wondered, had we just encountered an angel? I do not know to this day. But am reminded that we need to show love and kindness to all because it just might an angel.

The writer of Hebrews further reminds us in Hebrews 1:13-14 "*Now to which of the angels has he ever said: **Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool?** ¹⁴ Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve those who are going to inherit salvation?"* that angels are sent to minister to us and they did Christ when He was in garden.

Let us display that "brotherly" love to all at this time of year, it could be an angel you are ministering to. Don't be afraid to embrace more of Christ this year, may that be our goal to be more like Christ.

Day 23 – 18 December

Luke 2:12-14

I have got a secret – it's not a secret

In 1848 300,000 thousand people descending upon the mountains of California. Why? Because the news of gold being discovered people from all over the United States to take and strike it rich. To stake their claim and hopefully get enough gold to live on easy street the rest of their lives. Unfortunately for most that did not happen, most would wind up either worst off or dead. Mining for gold is risky business, but the facts that the news was spread made it appealing to all.

The news of a redeemer coming does much the same for those looking for “a better” life. Although the Scripture are announcements of His coming. It starts in the book of Genesis 3:15 *“I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.”* CSB. Adam and Eve have just eaten of the tree they were told not to. God in His questioning of them as to what happened get to Eve who blames the serpent. God then tells the serpent he is a “dead man walking.” God promises Adam and Eve and the serpent (Satan) that in the future a savior will come to set all things right. Isaiah tells us he will someone who does not stand in appearance 53:2 *“He grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground. He didn’t have an impressive form or majesty that we should look at him, no appearance that we should desire him.”* CSB. Micah tells us where he will be born 5:2 *“Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; one will come from you to be ruler over Israel for me. His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times.”* CSB God gave clues all throughout the Old Testament as to when Messiah came, it was no secret. The greatest announcement though was when the angelic

host proclaimed to the shepherds “But the angel said to them, Luke 2:10, 11“*Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: ¹¹ Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord.*” CSB

The birth of the Christ, the Messiah was not a secret event, it was meant to be secret on the contrary it was meant to be proclaimed. From Adam and Eve up to and including Mary and Joseph it was interwoven throughout the Scriptures. Let's be bold and proclaim the good news – Christ the Savior of the world is born.

Day 24 – 19 December

Luke 2:17-20

Deep Reflections

Did you ever get news that you just could not wait to share? A job promotion, an increase in salary, a pregnancy, or maybe a move. Remember how excited you were and the emotions you felt when you got to share something important with us.

That is where we find our shepherds. After the angelic left in the fields these lowly shepherds wasted no time in getting to Bethlehem to see this newborn savior. They were amazed to see this mother and child and what God had done. But it was not enough for them to simply see the savior they motivated to share what they heard and saw with others.

But don't forget Mary's response. Here is Mary and Joseph in that manger, stable amongst the animals and their new born child wrapped in strips of cloth lying in a feeding trough. Having just finished nursing the babe and placing in that manger, the shepherds show up. Mary has no idea they are coming and I am sure that she and Joseph were a little surprise. Which I think adds to verse 19 “*But Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them.*” CSB The Greek word

used her for “treasuring up” means to keep something from perishing and “ponder” to think about carefully. What two good principles for us: 1) to “treasure up” to keep the story of Christ’s birth from perishing, to keep it fresh and alive and 2) to “ponder” to think deeply about all that surrounds the birth of Christ, God enrobing himself in human flesh and the implications it carries for mankind. Let’s treasure up and ponder this Christmas.

Day 25 – 20 December

Luke 2:12

A Manger

Today let’s think about the “manger” itself. The box that was used to place food in for farm animals. In a spiritual sense it can represent Christ as spiritual food for man. Consider John 6: 35 “I am the bread of life,” Jesus told them. *“No one who comes to me will ever be hungry, and no one who believes in me will ever be thirsty again.”* CSB. Or how about John 6:14 *“But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life.”* CSB. In both these passages Jesus Himself tells us He is our “spiritual food.”

How about those “swaddling clothes?” In the first century, a newborn sacrificial lamb was often immediately wrapped in clean swaddling clothes to protect them and keep them from blemish and danger. This reminds of 1 Peter 1:18 -19 *“For you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb.”* CSB. In order for the sacrifice to be accepted it had to be spotless and unblemished, what wonder symbolism we see in the manger.

As we sit down with family and friends for the great Christmas Day dinner let's not forget to feast on the "Bread of Life and drink from the Living Water" we find in Christ.

Day 26 – 21 December

Matthew 2:1-2

The Magi

Now this part of the story we tell at Christmas, the birth of the Christ child, and yet it does not really take place at the nativity scene. The Wise men or magi show up at a house, not the stable and Matthew uses a word which we translate as child but it refers to a young child, not a baby. But let's focus on the Magi, Wise Men for a few moments. How many were there? How far did they come? And who were they?

These Wise Men would have astrologers and astronomers who studied the stars and planets. These would have counselors to the kings they served. And how would know what to look for in the significance of the star? The answers are found in my last question, how would they know what to look for? Many of the prophets of the Old Testament were exiles in Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah. Ezekiel, Daniel, Amos, and others wrote while captives. These prophets also carried with them the Hebrew Scripture such as Pentateuch, and Isaiah.

It is there that these Wise Men would have found the reason for the star. Daniel for example mentions the timing of when the Messiah would come, Micah mentions the place of His birth, Isaiah discusses His sufferings, etc.

The Magi although later in the story showed determination in searching the Scriptures for answers and dedication to see the reality of their message. Can we show such determination and dedication to continue to search the Scripture not for the birth of Christ but for His return and how we should live until He returns?

Day 27 – 22 December

John 1:1-5

The Word Made Flesh

In Genesis 1:1 we read that in the beginning, God created. He created the universe, earth, animals and climaxing with the creation of man. Before this, there was only God. Hard to imagine that.

John 1:1 informs us that God made everything from the very beginning and without Him there was nothing. Imagine the ability to speak something until existence. What greatness and power God has to be able to just speak and it is so. He creates everything He wants. How comforting and wonderful to know that this God, God who created the sun, moon stars, the oceans and creatures in them, the earth and the various creatures there and wrapping it all up by creating a creature in His image. His creation male and female to fill the earth, to multiply and manage the world in which He placed mankind. To know that God knows every little detail of my life, He knew me before I was in the womb, and He knows when my last day on this earth will be. How awesome to know He is in control of all and all I have to do is trust Him.

Remember to praise Him in all things, the good, and the bad because He is in control and has a plan to accomplish His good pleasure through it all.

Day 28 – 22 December

Isaiah 7:14

A Promise is a Promise

Remember when your parents or someone else made you a promise and kept it? We have all made promises and not kept them but the ones that were kept were special.

The promise of a savior was first made in the early days of mankind, shortly after Adam and Eve disobeyed and repeated throughout the Scriptures. The prophet Isaiah also repeated that promise over 700 years before Christ was born in that lowly stable manger. Can you imagine the generations after generations that heard the promise and ever wonder if it was really going to happen? I am sure some said that would never take place. But certain things had to be put in place before the Son of God could put on flesh and be born in Bethlehem.

Today there is an equally repeated promise for us, not about His birth but His return. 2 Peter 3:3 *"Above all, be aware of this: Scoffers will come in the last days scoffing and following their own evil desires, ⁴saying, 'Where is his 'coming' that he promised? Ever since our ancestors fell asleep, all things continue as they have been since the beginning of creation."* CSB Peter wrote those words over 1,900 years ago, it is a promise – He will return. There are many today that say it is just a myth He is not coming back but the reality is He will return.

Just as God promised a virgin would conceive and bear the Messiah, He has promised that Christ will return, not to a manger but to establish His kingdom forever. Oh, may it be this Christmas season that, we see the KING of Glory establish His righteous reign.

Day 29 – 23 December

Matthew 1:18-25

Holy Family

When we reflect upon the Christmas Story it is easy to focus on Joseph, Mary, and the Christ child. But there were others involved in this story as

well. The parents of Mary for one. Nothing is said of them nor the parents of Joseph. The Scripture are silent about them and yet they had a part in this story. What part, I really do not know but are going to make some thoughts. So, take these thoughts for what they are worth.

We do know that Joseph and Mary were considered by God as righteous. That means they had a deep commitment to love and serve God. I believe we can start there. Deuteronomy 6:4 *“Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. ⁶ These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. ⁷ Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. ⁹ Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates.”* CSB Instructed parents to teach the LORD’s commands to their children not in just a formal “school type” setting as a way of life. The parents of Joseph and Mary must also have had a deep commitment to serving God and passed that on to their children. And as children, their goal would be to honor their parents.

I imagine that when Mary came and told her parents that she was chosen to be the mother of the Messiah as a virgin her parents were shocked, maybe even uncertain of her story. The Scriptures tell us that just Joseph sought to quietly put her away. I think that although her story was fantastic Mary’s parents supported her. Even Joseph’s parents must have supported his decision given the cultural demands of the time this speaks volumes.

What a great family, Joseph, Mary, and their parents were all involved. Family is the cornerstone to any good society, break the family and society breaks down. Let’s remember family and encourage one another in manner like that of Joseph, Mary, and their parents.

Day 30 – 24 December**Luke 2:11**Awe and Wonder

Here we are, Christmas Eve. The day before we celebrate the birth of our Savior. A day many of us will go to a Candle Light Service. An evening designed to prepare our hearts and minds for that awesome day – 25 December – Christ’s birth. We will wake up on that morning with our homes decorated, the smell of evergreen wafting through the house, and maybe the smell of breakfast too. There will be brightly wrapped gifts scattered around a tree or living room and excitement will be in each heart to see what each has received. And if we are lucky maybe even a nice snowfall covering the ground outside. Ah! What a day.

Yet, as nice as all of that is. The real awe and wonder came from a gift that was given over 1,900 years ago in a little town in southern Israel – Bethlehem. The Son of God wrapped in swaddling clothes to give us the best gift ever – Salvation.

Let me wrap this up with the lyrics from Silent Night:

*1 Silent night! Holy night!
 All is calm, all is bright
 'round yon virgin mother and child!
 Holy infant, so tender and mild,
 sleep in heavenly peace,
 sleep in heavenly peace.*

*2 Silent night! Holy night!
 Shepherds quake at the sight.
 Glories stream from heaven afar,*

*heav'nly hosts sing, "Alleluia!
Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born!"*

*3 Silent night! Holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
radiant beams from Thy holy face
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth!
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth!*

Even so, LORD Jesus Come!

In conclusion, the 30-day journey of reflections on the events leading up to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem offers a profound opportunity for spiritual growth and contemplation. Through exploring the biblical passages, we have delved into the significance of the Messiah's arrival, the faith and obedience of individuals like Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds, and the fulfillment of ancient prophecies.

As we approach Christmas, may we carry the lessons learned from this journey in our hearts. Let us remember the awe and wonder of God's plan unfolding, the importance of faith and obedience in fulfilling His purpose, and the joy of celebrating the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

May the reflections on this journey inspire us to deepen our relationship with God, to embrace His promises with faith, and to share the message of hope and salvation found in the birth of Christ. As we enter into the Christmas season, may the peace, love, and joy of the birth of Jesus fill our hearts and homes, guiding us in faith and gratitude throughout the coming days and beyond.

