

Taking Christmas Captive for Christ:

Theme: Recapturing Christmas from the world.

II Corinthians 10:5

We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

It is easy to make the commitment to celebrate Christmas with Christ at the center. But it seems that each year as the day approaches we get more and more entangled in the trappings presented to us by the world. While many of these are certainly not wrong, they do present to us distractions that pull our attention away from the true spiritual celebration that is at the foundation of Christmas.

So, with this in mind, the following daily guide is given in hopes that you will be able to focus on Christ this holiday season. Share this with your family and friends. In doing so, you will be able to give a personal witness as to the reason you celebrate Christmas as a "holiday." **Remember the word holiday is derived from two words meaning "holy day."**

Use this guide as your daily devotional and prayer guide. Follow the suggested decorating tips and symbolic activities that will enable you to go about your holiday activities with Christ as the central figure.

Section One: Christmas Prophecy: "I Told You So"

Friday, December 1:

Scripture: Jeremiah 31:31-34

"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. ³³ "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴ "And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Thoughts:

This prophecy tells of the new covenant God desired to have with His people. This covenant would be intimate and personal in nature rather than governed by rites and sacrifices. Take a moment and reflect upon the great joy you have received as a part of this new covenant. Praise the Lord for His forgiveness and the removal of our sin barrier. You now have the glorious honor of personally knowing God through Jesus Christ. And it all started at Christmas. How can we not make this a “holy-day?”

Prayer Focus: Prophecy Fulfilled

I truly know Jesus and can know Him personally and intimately. Praise God!

Saturday, December 2:

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6-7

*For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
From then on and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.*

Thoughts:

Some 600 years before the birth of Christ, the prophet Isaiah was given a glimpse into the nature of our Savior’s mission. Jesus was to be the very cornerstone upon which God would establish this “new covenant” with His people. Focus on the names given to our Savior in this prophecy. Each name represents an aspect of His nature and how He was to fulfill His mission. Claim each of these names and praise the Lord for the way you have experienced them throughout your relationship with Jesus.

Prayer Focus: Prophecy Fulfilled

“Wonder-planner” The plan of God is Jesus
Mighty—Supreme and Sovereign—the power to uphold the plan
Father—the experience of His perfect care and love
Peace—“Shalom” Complete wholeness found in Christ

Sunday, December 3:

Scripture: Micah 5:2-3

*" But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity."*

*³ Therefore, He will give them up until the time
When she who is in labor has borne a child.
Then the remainder of His brethren
Will return to the sons of Israel.*

Thoughts:

Such a small place and yet, God was to use Bethlehem as a site the entire world would focus upon each year. The focus occurs not because of the city itself but because of what happened there one night in a lowly stable. Remember, we can never present greatness to the Lord. He takes what we present, no matter how seemingly small and insignificant, and by His touch alone, He makes it great for His glory. This Christmas, take an aspect of your life that may seem small and present it to the Lord. It may just become the focus through which God receives glory and honor.

Prayer Focus: Prophecy Fulfilled

A small village used as the birthplace of the Savior. My life, no longer insignificant but is now a source of glory to the King.

Monday, December 4:

Scripture: Isaiah 7:14

Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.

Thoughts:

Of all the unique and wondrous aspects surrounding Christ's birth, the virgin birth is central to them all. Have you ever noticed how God always does things contrary to our human way of thinking--death brings about life--servitude brings greatness--losing your life brings about the gaining of life? The virgin birth makes Christ unique among all people. Through this, we can claim a Savior who did indeed dwell among us in the flesh but at the same time was not solely the product of human creation--fully human and fully divine.

Prayer Focus: Prophecy Fulfilled

Jesus is the one and only—fully divine as Sovereign Lord and yet, He walked in the flesh among us. No matter the trial or struggle, He understands and He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Section Two: Christmas Light

Of all the themes we could use to prepare ourselves for the Christmas holy-day, perhaps the most appropriate is that of light. It is by no mistake that Christmas lights are central to the decorations we use to emphasize this time of year. Take this week and concentrate of the “Light of the World.” Incorporate this theme into the way you decorate your house for the holidays.

Tuesday, December 5:

Scripture: Isaiah 9:2

*The people who walk in darkness
Will see a great light;
Those who live in a dark land,
The light will shine on them.*

Thoughts:

Have you ever noticed that darkness can have a suffocating fear to it? I have never met anyone who is afraid of the light. Those without Jesus walk in a constant state of darkness--a spiritual blindness that causes them to “feel their way” through life without any real guidance and direction. We cannot generate light from within. The light of God “shines on” us from a source outside of our lives and from within us through salvation. That source is Jesus Christ and because of Christmas, we no longer “feel our way” through life, we have a way that is clearly illuminated by the love of our Lord. Let your life be a light that guides others to our Blessed Savior.

Prayer Focus:

The Light is within us. Jesus stated that He is the Light of the world. He also stated that we are the light of the world because of Him. Pray for your light to shine brightly so that He will be glorified through you.

Wednesday, December 6:

Scripture: John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

Thoughts:

How can darkness not comprehend the light? After all, they are the exact opposite of each other. Have you ever lit a candle in a totally dark room? That candle becomes the very focus of its surroundings because light will always overpower darkness. What the Word is saying to us is that the darkness of this world will never have the power to absorb the light of God. The light of Christ cannot be snuffed out, it is and always will be the very power of God. This Christmas season allow the power of His light to shine in your life no matter how strong the darkness may seem that surrounds you. All it takes is one small light to dispel the darkness. Celebrate Christ with light.

Prayer Focus:

Lord, the darkness cannot take the Light from me, but I can allow it to be covered. Uncover the Light in me through Your love and grace so that it may shine on You alone.

Thursday, December 7:

Scripture: Luke 2:8-11

And in the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields, and keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; ¹¹ for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Thoughts:

The glory of the Lord always shines. It is the true light of this world. When the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds, their fear became evident to the heavenly messenger. He quickly assured them that in this case fear was not the proper response to the glory around them. For them, as for us, the proper response is that of joy. We, like the shepherds, have participated in the “good news” that a Savior has come to this earth. This Christmas season do not allow the trivialities of the holidays damper to the light of the joy that comes from this “holy-day.”

Prayer Focus:

Jesus, my prayer is that my life will remain directed in joy towards You. Do not let me allow distractions to turn my focus away from the holiness of this season.

Friday, December 8:

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-2

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ² "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him."

Thoughts:

What better way to announce the birth of your Son than to place a great light in the heavens that shines so bright that it attracts the attention of "wisemen." I find it interesting that the magi saw the star and knew it signified the birth of a King who was worthy of their worship. The light led them to the presence of the Lord. The light of Christ in your life is to shine in such a way that others will be drawn to worship the Christ of Christmas. What is your light leading others to find?

Prayer Focus:

Shine in me so that the world will be drawn to You. Create in me a magnetic faith that draws others to search for You.

Saturday, December 9:

Scripture: John 12: 42

I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness.

Thoughts:

We no longer live in darkness. This means we have guidance, direction, security, and revelation. Christ brought the light of God into this sin-darkened world and into our sin-darkened hearts. We no longer live in darkness. Praise God! Through His light in your life, you can share guidance, direction, security, and revelation with others this Christmas season.

Prayer Focus:

Praise the Lord for the truth found in Colossians 1:13-14. Live the transferred life.

Sunday, December 10:

Scripture: John 8:12

Again, therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life."

Thoughts:

We cannot always give or receive what we want at Christmas. There are limits to what we are capable of being and doing. We cannot be our own light. To illuminate our greatest need and then direct us to an eternal solution is beyond any capability we could ever hope to have. Only in Christ do we have our greatest need revealed and are then led to an eternal solution--an intimate relationship with Jesus. Take a moment and make sure that you are not assuming too great of a role in anyone's life or in your life for that matter. You can point and share the Light but you cannot be the light.

Prayer Focus:

Praise the Lord for the fact that all we are not—He is.

Monday, December 11:

Scripture: Matthew 5:14-16

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ "Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

Thoughts:

I know you are saying that yesterday I told you that you cannot be the light and now we read where Jesus says we are the light. There is a difference between reflected light and generated light. We cannot generate the light on our own, but we can serve to be a reflector of the light placed in our lives by Christ. We cannot cover the light so that we are the only ones who benefit by its presence. Light must shine! Light must be prevalent! Light must go and dispel darkness! Celebrate the coming of the true Light into this world by allowing it to shine forth from your life so that others may see it as coming from a greater source than you. Reflect don't cover!

Prayer Focus:

Look at ways light can be a central theme in your Christmas celebration this year. Decorate your life and your home in such a way that the lights you choose to use point others to the Light you have chosen to love.

Section Three: It's All in the Baby's Name

Christmas is about a birth. There is no holiday (holy-day) or reason to celebrate if we do not recognize this fact. Nothing brings a greater amount of joy to a family than the birth of a child. One of the great joys surrounding this occasion is the choosing of a name for the new life given as a trust by the Lord. Names reflect something about this new life. It may reflect the fact that a son will carry on the family name. A name can reflect the desires of the parents for that child. Our name identifies us to others and provides a way of introducing us those we meet.

God the Father was no different from any other parent in this respect. He wanted to make sure the world new the name of His Son. He wanted to make sure that His Son's name would accurately reflect both His character and His mission of salvation. As we continue to take Christmas captive for Christ, we will focus on the names given to our Wonderful Savior, Jesus Christ. These names serve to reinforce the true spiritual meaning of this blessed season.

Tuesday, December 12:

Scripture: Luke 1:30-33; Matthew 1:21

*The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.
³¹ "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him **Jesus**.
³² "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; ³³ and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."*

*"She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name **Jesus**, for He will save His people from their sins."*

Thoughts:

Jesus, the name given to reveal what this wonderful child would do for us. The name means "the Lord is salvation." Jesus came to ransom our lives and return us to the intimate fellowship with the Lord that was intended from the beginning. We are saved! Praise JESUS for the gift we have through Him alone.

Prayer Focus:

Have you ever considered that your salvation is a Christmas present—the greatest present we could ever receive? Now, consider the appropriate reaction for having unwrapped such a gift.

Wednesday, December 13:

Scripture: Luke 2:10-11

*But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; ¹¹ for today in the city of David there has been born for you a **Savior**, who is Christ the Lord*

Thoughts:

The word savior carries with it the meaning of one who preserves life. The salvation that Jesus brought to us through the cross means more than the forgiveness of sins. Through salvation, we are offered a new life that is preserved by the very hand of God. We are given life that is both abundant and eternal in nature. It is a relationship of life that is kept by the power of Christ Himself and does not rely upon our ability or strength. Praise the Lord for His great salvation this Christmas. It is found only in the blessed Child of Christmas.

Prayer Focus:

Praise the Lord for the fact that we have been given new life in Christ. A life preserved and kept by the power of His love for you. John 10:27-30

Thursday, December 14:

Scripture: Luke 2:10-11

*But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; ¹¹ for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is **Christ** the Lord.*

Thoughts:

Christ simply means anointed. Anointing was an act performed to show that a person had been set aside by God for special service. This "setting aside" is uniquely seen in the life of Jesus. When Christ is coupled with the name Jesus we arrive at a title that means, "***the One set aside (anointed) to be the salvation of God.***" The Father wanted there to be no mistake that His Son alone would be the One through whom we could find new life, redemption, and fulfillment. It is His coming to us that we prepare to celebrate this Christmas season.

Prayer Focus:

As Christ was set aside as the way for our salvation, let us set aside this "holy day" to honor Him alone.

Friday, December 15:

Scripture: Matthew 1:23

*"BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME **IMMANUEL**," which translated, means, "GOD WITH US."*

Thoughts:

Immanuel, God with us, is the name spoken to Joseph by the angel as this young man pondered his relationship with a pregnant Mary. What comfort this name, Immanuel, must have brought to Joseph as he accepted the task appointed to him by the Lord. What comfort it brings to us to know that in Christ, God has come to be with His people. A closeness not found in religious ritual but rather, a closeness marked by internal intimacy and love. No matter what you face this season, you do not face it alone. Immanuel, God with us, is there.

Prayer Focus:

God with us—God in us through Jesus Christ. Spiritual, relational intimacy is the joy of our salvation.

Saturday, December 16:

Scripture: Luke 2:10-11

*But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; ¹¹ for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ **the Lord**."*

Thoughts:

Why is Lord such an easy term for us to apply to Jesus but such a difficult one to live? Throughout our lives we have many lords, those who exercise some modicum of authority over us. But the angel wanted to make sure the shepherds understood that Jesus was to be "the Lord." One in whom all authority would rest. This Christmas season make a renewed commitment to allow Jesus to be the Lord of your life. Live under His authority and you will know an increase of joy and peace.

Prayer Focus:

Reconsider the emphasis we place of the title, Lord. Pray that the reality of Jesus as Lord will increase in our lives and our living.

Sunday, December 17:

Scripture: Micah 5:2-4; John 10:11

*But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity." ³ Therefore He will give them up until the time
When she who is in labor has borne a child.
Then the remainder of His brethren
Will return to the sons of Israel. ⁴ And He will arise and **shepherd** His flock
In the strength of the LORD,
In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God.
And they will remain,
Because at that time He will be great
To the ends of the earth.*

*"I am the good shepherd; the **good shepherd** lays down His life for the sheep."*

Thoughts:

It is by no mistake that the first people to receive word about the birth of Christ were shepherds. The prophecy in Micah reveals that the One born in Bethlehem would shepherd His people and this was echoed by Jesus in John 10:11 when He applied the title of "good shepherd" to Himself. A shepherd guides the flock, protects it, leads it to food and water, loves it, and makes it his very life. All of this is reflected in the great love Jesus has for us. Follow the Good Shepherd for He will lead you to truth and the grace of God.

Prayer Focus:

Praise Jesus, our Lord, for all He is as our perfect, "good shepherd."

Monday, December 18:

Scripture: Matthew 2:2; Matthew 27:37

*"Where is He who has been born **King of the Jews**? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."*

*And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots. ³⁶ And sitting down, they began to keep watch over Him there. ³⁷ And above His head they put up the charge against Him which read, "**THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.**"*

Thoughts:

The Wisemen came seeking a king whose birth had been proclaimed by a star. They came to worship what they thought would be an earthly ruler. Little did they know that the reign of this little child was to be eternally life-giving. The Roman soldier placed the sign atop the cross as an accusation and a mockery as our Savior gave His life for ours. This world still attempts to reduce Jesus to an earthly being who can be mocked. As His children, we can insure that this season they hear from us that Jesus is indeed the King of King and the Lord of Lords.

Prayer Focus:

Use as your prayer focus Philippians 2:9-11 and enjoy the effect it has on your prayer life today.

Section Four: The Complete Cast of Characters

By looking at the cast of characters assembled by God to be involved in the birth of His Son, we can experience and observe all that this season brings. Allow the Lord to open your emotions as you read these familiar passages. Try and put yourself in their place as they are used by God to bring about the greatest event in human history. This is the week of Christmas. It is the final time of preparation in our effort to take Christmas captive for Christ. What better way to do so than to put ourselves inside the minds and lives of those surrounding the newborn Babe.

Tuesday, December 19:

Scripture: Luke 1:26-33

Person: Gabriel

*Now in the sixth month **the angel Gabriel** was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth,²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.²⁸ And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."²⁹ But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was.³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.³¹ "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.³² "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David;³³ and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."*

Thoughts:

What a job! To be the one God selected to announce to Mary the coming of the Savior and to assure her that the Lord was using her in a way that set her apart from all other women must have given Gabriel such a sense of joy. Remember, he had seen the activity in heaven preparing for this moment. He understood the love and joy of the Father to bring to this earth the reality of salvation. And now, the time had come for this plan to begin and it was to begin with the angel of proclamation sharing the good news with a young woman named Mary. Be a part of the joy of announcing the plan of God to others this season.

Prayer Focus:

Pray for the joy of announcing the birth of Jesus to increase in your life. Ask for opportunities to be someone's Gabriel.

Wednesday, December 20:

Scripture: Luke 1:46-55:

Person: Mary

And Mary said:

"My soul exalts the Lord,⁴⁷ And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.⁴⁸ "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant;

For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.⁴⁹ "For the Mighty One has done great things for me;

And holy is His name.⁵⁰ "AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION

TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.⁵¹ "He has done mighty deeds with His arm;

He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.⁵² "He has brought down rulers from their thrones,

And has exalted those who were humble.⁵³ "HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS;

And sent away the rich empty-handed.⁵⁴ "He has given help to Israel His servant,

In remembrance of His mercy,⁵⁵ As He spoke to our fathers,

To Abraham and his descendants forever."

Thoughts:

Did Mary understand fully what was happening to her? Was she afraid? What we have before us is a young girl's joyous response to the Lord's choice of her life. Any fear or reluctance she may have had was swallowed by the sheer joy of being used by God. This Christmas, put your "what if's and what about's" on the back burner long enough to experience the joy of being used by God. He has a plan for your life and has also chosen you to be an integral part of the completion of His will for this earth. All it takes is for you to believe it. Show your belief by celebrating the reality of His choice of your life.

Prayer Focus:

Praise the Lord! You are uniquely chosen by God—you are His instrument.

Thursday, December 21:

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25

Person: Joseph

Scripture:

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. ²⁰ But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." ²² Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." ²⁴ And Joseph awoke from his sleep and **did as the angel of the Lord commanded him**, and took Mary as his wife, ²⁵ but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.*

Thoughts:

Joseph is a study in obedience when obedience is not easy. Everything the angel said to him went against the current of societal thinking. Joseph felt as though he was acting righteous by not exposing Mary for prosecution. Isn't it odd how the Lord takes what we think is righteous and then challenges us with true righteousness. Righteousness is not found in simply going against the grain of society but rather, in being completely obedient to the will of God for your life no matter how odd that may seem. Obedience brings joy. You cannot have one without the other this Christmas season.

Prayer Focus:

Praise God for the difficulty you have in being obedient. It means you have a desire to follow Him and that He is growing your faith and relationship with Him.

Friday, December 22:

Scripture: Luke 2:8-20

Person: The Shepherds

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; ¹¹ for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

¹⁵ When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

Thoughts:

Being an unexpected part of something wonderful is so exciting. Certainly, the lowly shepherds never expected to be included in something as magnificent as the birth of the Savior. And yet, they were the first to be told that the birth had occurred. No wonder they rejoiced and left the flock to see what had been told to them. There are so many people surrounding us each day who feel as though they have no right to be included in such a wonderful event as Christmas. Do the unexpected. Let them know that the "Savior who is Christ the Lord" has come just for them.

Prayer Focus:

Never look away from someone or through someone because they are different or don't measure up. Ask that you see others through the eyes of God. The "shepherds" are all around us.

Saturday, December 23:

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-16

Person: Herod

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ² "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: ⁶ 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.' "

⁷ Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him." ⁹ After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

¹³ Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him."*

¹⁴ So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. ¹⁵ He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON."

¹⁶ Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi.

Thoughts:

The world will always attempt to destroy the truth of God found in Jesus Christ. Herod stands as an example of all that is worldly and evil. But the Lord also shows us through this record of Herod's atrocities that the world will never stop the love of God through Christ. Christ's love is unstoppable. We look at the onslaught of evil in this world and are shocked by its destructive power. Never forget that "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." Even the murderous death of Jesus could not stop the love of God--it simply made salvation possible for all who will accept.

Prayer Focus:

It is the scheme of evil to attempt to overwhelm our faith. When you are confronted with this—look to the cross! What they thought ended it all was the power that began it all.

Sunday, December 24:

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-2; 9-12

Person: The Wise Men

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ² "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."

After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

Thoughts:

God always honors those who search to find Him. We tend to focus upon the gifts presented to the Child by the Magi. This Christmas focus upon their desire to find what the heavenly light was proclaiming. Worship is the natural reaction to finding Christ and presenting gifts must always be a part of true worship. Worship becomes rather hollow when we attempt to present something to someone we have never truly sought to find. Know that the Lord will honor your efforts to know more about Christ. When that search is honored remember, the natural reaction is to worship Christ by the presenting yourself to Him for His Lordship.

Prayer Focus:

Keep finding Him.

Keep worshipping Him.

Keep bowing before Him.

Keep proclaiming what you find!

Monday, December 25: Christmas Day! Happy Birthday Jesus Christ the Lord Immanuel!

Scripture: Luke 2:9-14

Person: The angelic host

*And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "**Do not be afraid**; for behold, I bring you good news of **great joy** which will be **for all the people**; ¹¹ for today in the city of David there has been **born for you** a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² "This will be a sign for you: **you will find** a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host **praising God** and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."*

Thoughts:

Merry Christmas! Happy Holy-Day! Look at the words placed in bold type. If anyone knew how the Father expects us to celebrate the birth of His Son, it had to be those sent from His presence to share the news with the world. Do not be afraid to let the light of your faith shine this Christmas. Meet this season with a great joy that obviously goes beyond the ranks of human happiness. Share Christ without restriction with all people. Make Christ personal. He was born for you and praise God, you have found Him as your personal Lord and Savior. And then simply praise the Lord! Do it openly and loudly. If the angels can shout it from a hilltop, we can certainly proclaim it around the table or the tree.

Prayer Focus:

Take a moment today away from family and present to the Lord a gift of private praise and worship. Let Him know you recognize His Lordship and bow your life before Him in praise and adoration.

Section Five: A New Life From a New Life

Tuesday, December 26:

Scripture: Luke 2:25-35

And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, ²⁸ then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, ²⁹ "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace,

According to Your word; ³⁰ For my eyes have seen Your salvation, ³¹ Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES,

And the glory of Your people Israel."

³³ And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed— ³⁵ and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Thoughts:

Is Jesus the fulfillment of your life? Simeon, upon seeing Jesus, knew that his life was completely fulfilled. God laid on his heart to share with Mary and Joseph reassuring words that this child was bring salvation to this world. But salvation was not without a heavy price--Jesus' death would bring untold agony to Mary. Praise the Lord today for the price He paid and the agony He endured to bring fulfillment to your life.

Prayer Focus:

Consider in prayer the difference in Jesus as Savior and Jesus as Savior and fulfillment of your life. Recall what Jesus identified as the greatest and foremost commandment.

Wednesday, December 27:

Scripture: Luke 2:36-38

And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. ³⁸ At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Thoughts:

A redirection of Anna's life occurred the moment she saw the Light of God in Mary's arms. Having spent her life in the Temple serving the Lord, she now came face to face with what she had been longing to see--the Messiah. Try and imagine the joy as she began to praise the Lord. Can't you just see her running from person to person sharing the reality that the Savior had finally come. Having come face to face with Jesus, how contained is your joy?

Prayer Focus:

Each day come face-to-face with the reality of Jesus in you. Never lose the wonderment of that truth.

Thursday, December 28:

Scripture: Matthew 2:13-15; 19-23

Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him."*

¹⁴ So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. ¹⁵ He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON."

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, ²⁰ "Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead." ²¹ So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee, ²³ and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: "He shall be called a Nazarene."*

Thoughts:

Our God gives such attention to details. Notice in this passage how He uses the flight to Egypt to fulfill even the smallest detail in prophecy. And in doing so, He protects the life of our Savior. If the Lord gives that much attention to detail in this situation to insure our salvation, just think how concerned He is with our everyday life. Let Him in today!

Prayer Focus:

No detail of your life is too small or insignificant for our God who gave bees hairy legs. Give Him the details and you will see extraordinary miracles.

Friday, December 29:

Scripture: II Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Thoughts:

We fear newness because in newness there is an element of the unknown. It demands a release of control. In order for Christ to make us new, we must release control to Him. We can do this without fear or hesitation because He has proven His love for us by the cross. As we learn about the love of Christ, our trust in Him grows which allows Him to create in us a growing newness that reflects His image to this world. Trust and let Him recreate your life one day at a time, one step at a time.

Prayer Focus:

Lord, make me new! Mold me into a reflection of Your nature. Change all of me—attitudes, actions, judgments, and personality. I want to look back next Christmas and be able to see the recreations You have brought about in me.

Saturday, December 30

Scripture: Ephesians 4:24

and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Thoughts:

Everyone has a personal image they attempt to achieve. Some are stylish, some attempt to be casual, while others go to great lengths to appear to be sophisticated. The Bible tells us that when we come to new life in Christ we are to strive to allow the Lord to create within us His image. We are to be molded into “Christians” which originally meant “little Christs.” How are you doing in letting Christ infiltrate and recreate the differing areas of your life? It’s the only way to find joy and fulfillment in our spiritual lives.

Prayer Focus:

Never fear the word “new.” Spiritually, it means there is more of Him and less of me—our true sense of joy.

Sunday, December 31

Scripture: Revelation 21:1-7

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

⁵ And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." ⁶ Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. ⁷ "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.*

Thoughts:

Our God is a God of completion. He never starts anything He does not finish. In Christ, salvation was brought to us and in Christ, salvation will be brought to its ultimate completion with the creation of the new heaven and the new earth. It's great to not only know the beginning of something but to have the Lord let us know how all of this will come to fruition. This gives us a completion to the hope we have in Christ. As you read this passage try to envision the complete intimacy we will have with the Lord as we dwell in His presence eternally. Praise the Lord!

Prayer Focus:

The world is not the end for us. Place your prayers and thoughts on what it will be like to live in complete perfection in His presence.