



# Countdown to Christmas Devotional



**Friendship  
Vallejo**

The Church For The City



Dear Beloved Community,

Grace and peace to you in this joyful season of anticipation and celebration! As we approach the advent of Christmas, I am delighted to share with you a special 12-day devotional journey. These devotionals are carefully crafted to bring us closer to the heart of the Christmas story, inviting us to reflect on its profound significance in our lives.

- **Day 1: A reason to be generous this Christmas**
  - *Scripture:* Isaiah 53:1-6, John 3:16-17, John 20:31
- **Day 2: God uses imperfect people**
  - *Scripture:* Matthew 1:1-17
- **Day 3: Who is Jesus?**
  - *Scripture:* Luke 2:21-35
- **Day 4: God gives us exactly what we need**
  - *Scripture:* Luke 2:36-40, Matthew 5:17-18
- **Day 5: I can give my heart to Him**
  - *Scripture:* Matthew 2:1-12
- **Day 6: Run with the good news this Christmas**
  - *Scripture:* Isaiah 52:7-10, Romans 10:8-15
- **Day 7: Jesus is a different kind of king**
  - *Scripture:* Isaiah 11:1-10
- **Day 8: The unexpected miracle**
  - *Scripture:* Isaiah 53:1-6, John 3:16-17, John 20:31
- **Day 9: God included you**
  - *Scripture:* Psalm 105:1-4, Psalm 68:3-5

In the final day, we focus on Psalm 105:1-4 and Psalm 68:3-5, celebrating the inclusive nature of the Christmas message. It's an invitation to embrace the joy that Jesus brings, recognizing His lordship in our lives.

This 12-day devotional journey is not just a countdown to Christmas; it's an opportunity for us to deepen our understanding of the profound love and grace encapsulated in the birth of our Savior. May these reflections draw us closer to God's heart and inspire us to share the true meaning of Christmas with those around us.

Blessings and joy,

Pastor Justin R. Lester

## **Day 1: A reason to be generous this Christmas**

*Read Isaiah 53:1-6, John 3:16-17, John 20:31*

When rescue doesn't come the way we thought it would, we grow restless. Often, God works in ways we don't expect and would never see coming. Jesus fulfilled every Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah. Yet, His life runs contrary to the Savior people had in mind.

Israel waited for the deliverance of a mighty king. But their rescuer wasn't going to be typical. Messiah would have "no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2-3). This suffering servant would be pierced, crushed, and wounded for them (Isaiah 53:5).

"He was despised and rejected— a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care." - Isaiah 53:3, NLT

Jesus didn't take over by might or force of will. Instead, Jesus gave His life so we could have eternal life. What God has prepared for us is greater than our expectations (1 Corinthians 2:9). Maybe you need healing from a chronic illness. Maybe you're looking for work and wondering how you will provide for your family. The miracle you're looking for might not come in the package you expect. But God is faithful to fulfill His promises.

Reflect:

- Do miracles happen in expected ways?
- How have you seen suffering and uncertainty amplify the glory of God?
- What miracles are you waiting for this Christmas?

## Day 2: God uses imperfect people

*Read Matthew 1:1-17*

What kind of people fulfill the purpose of God? Look at Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1. The people included in Jesus' family tree are far from perfect.

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." - Matthew 1:1

Abraham followed God to an unknown land but lost faith in God's plan for his family and had a son with his maid (Genesis 16:1-4). Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute (Genesis 38). David, known as a man after God's heart, committed adultery and murdered his good friend to cover it up (2 Samuel 11). Rahab was a prostitute (Joshua 2). Manasseh and Abijah were evil (2 Kings 21:1-3 and 1 Kings 15:3).

Matthew 1 is proof that God accomplishes His perfect plan with imperfect people. This doesn't excuse our sin. The men and women in Jesus' family tree brought suffering to their world. People were hurt, even killed as a result of their decisions. But God's grace is greater than our sin. Jesus commissions us to be part of His story. As we tap into the message and the power Jesus gives us, God works through us to change the world despite our flaws.

Reflect:

- How does God work through human imperfection? How have you seen this?
- What does it mean to repent? How does God's kindness lead to repentance?

## Day 3: Who is Jesus?

*Read Luke 2:21-35*

Christmas presses us all to answer the most important question: Who is Jesus?

“He took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ‘Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.’ - Luke 2:28-32

In Luke 2, the Holy Spirit leads a righteous and devout man named Simeon to the temple on the day of Jesus’ circumcision. Simeon praises God for allowing him to see the promised Messiah, then says to Mary,

“...This child marks both the failure and the recovery of many in Israel, A figure misunderstood and contradicted— the pain of a sword-thrust through you— But the rejection will force honesty, as God reveals who they really are” Luke 2:33-35, MSG

Simeon prophesies that Jesus will be “a figure misunderstood and contradicted.” Is Jesus misunderstood or is He Messiah? Is Jesus only a reason to decorate, gather friends, and feast? Or, Do we acknowledge Him as Savior of the world, Immanuel, Prince of Peace?

When we see Jesus as Savior, our perspective on Christmas changes. Buying presents becomes a reminder of God’s blessing instead of a burden. Gatherings go from obligations to opportunities to celebrate and reflect the gift of Jesus. When Jesus is at the center, every Christmas moment becomes an act of worship.

Reflect:

- In Mark 8:29, Jesus asks Peter, "Who do you say I am?" How would you answer Jesus’ question? Who do you say He is?
- What is one way you can put Jesus at the center of your day today?

## **Day 4: God gives us exactly what we need**

*Read Luke 2:36-40, Matthew 5:17-18*

The Old Testament commanded that God's people love Him and love others (Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Leviticus 19:18). After generations of trying, Israel discovered what God knew to be true. We are incapable of keeping God's law without His special help.

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." - Matthew 5:17

When we see Jesus' arrival in the context of the Old Testament, we understand why Anna "began to give thanks to God and to speak of Him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38). For hundreds of years, Israel languished waiting for the anointed deliverer. Anna, Simeon, and later John the Baptist recognized Jesus as the long-promised Messiah. Jesus did everything the prophets described— sometimes in unexpected ways.

Jesus' death and resurrection provide a way for us to experience freedom from sin. When we believe in Jesus, we receive His Spirit, and with it, the ability to really love and finally fulfill God's law. Like Anna, we can give thanks to God for our salvation and speak of His deliverance to everyone, everywhere.

Reflect:

- How does Jesus' statement that He came to fulfill the law and prophets change your view of the Old Testament?
- What can we learn from Anna's joy and excitement in seeing the Lord?

## Day 5: I can give my heart to Him

*Read Matthew 2:1-12*

Jesus was probably one or two years old when the wise men arrived. Though Jesus was unable to do anything for them, they were overjoyed to see Him and showered Him with gifts fit for royalty. The wise men celebrated Jesus purely for who He is— a miracle child and promised king. Jesus had yet to heal a single person or preach a single message.

“And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.” - Matthew 2:11

God is pleased when we acknowledge the good things He does for us. But suppose God never does another thing for us, He would still be worthy of worship.

Romans 12:1 tells us, “True and proper worship is to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.” Worship is a life lived for the Lord. Worship is willingly surrendering to God’s plan for our lives every day. When we do, we give Jesus the greatest gift of all — a heart devoted to Him alone.

In her poem, “In the Bleak Midwinter,” Christina Rossetti writes: What can I give Him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb; If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part; Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.

Of course, we are thankful for all that He has done and will do for us. But for today, let’s give our hearts fully to Jesus and follow the lead of the wise men who praised Jesus simply for who He is— the King of kings.

Reflect:

- What happens in your heart and mind when you praise God for His provision versus praise God for who He is?
- What do you love about Jesus? Tell Him.

## **Day 6: Run with the good news this Christmas**

*Read Isaiah 52:7-10, Romans 10:8-15*

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’” - Isaiah 52:7

If you’ve ever seen a runner’s feet you know the beauty Isaiah describes isn’t in the feet themselves but in what they represent.

In Isaiah’s day, people waited impatiently at home for any news from a battle. Messengers ran from the front lines to inform the city. From a distance, watchmen could determine if a messenger ran with good news or bad news based on their posture and speed. When the messenger delivered the good news, everyone celebrated.

Isaiah says the LORD Himself brings good news of victory! We, too, can be good news messengers or evangelists declaring Jesus’ victory (Romans 10:13). Because Jesus won the victory over sin and death, those of us who have been saved and set free can share the message of victory to the world: “Salvation is here!”

There is no better time than now, during the celebration of His birth, to share with friends and family the victory and hope Jesus brings.

Reflect:

- What makes the Gospel good news for you?
- Are there people you know who need to hear the good news of Jesus? Ask the Lord for the opportunity to share it with them.



## Day 7: Jesus is a different kind of king

*Read Isaiah 11:1-10*

We all have bosses — some good, some not.

“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.” - Isaiah 11:1-2

Jesus is a different kind of King. Imagine a boss who is always wise, patient, gentle, kind, and faithful to keep his promises. What if that leader always had his employees' best interests at heart? And, what if following this authority led to more peace than you knew was possible? Isaiah tells us that this type of King will rule the people of God.

These verses announced to God's people that your Savior is coming! This King will be righteous and dispense justice based on obedience, not favoritism. This kingdom would be different than anything we have ever known. This King will ask people to follow Him.

He will draw people to Himself through love, not fear. Jesus is the king Isaiah describes. And when He returns to rule and reign, “the whole earth will be brimming with knowing God-Alive, a living knowledge of God ocean-deep, ocean-wide” Isaiah 11:9, MSG.

Reflect:

- How does Isaiah's description of the King remind you of Jesus?
- How might your relationship with Jesus need to change to reflect that He is both Savior and Ruler?

## **Day 8: The unexpected miracle**

*Read Isaiah 53:1-6, John 3:16-17, John 20:31*

When rescue doesn't come the way we thought it would, we grow restless. Often, God works in ways we don't expect and would never see coming. Jesus fulfilled every Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah. Yet, His life runs contrary to the Savior people had in mind. Israel waited for the deliverance of a mighty king. But their rescuer wasn't going to be typical. Messiah would have "no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2-3). This suffering servant would be pierced, crushed, and wounded for them (Isaiah 53:5).

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- Do miracles happen in expected ways?
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## **Day 9: God included you**

*Read Psalm 105:1-4, Psalm 68:3-5*

Today, as you read the Christmas story and reflect on Jesus' birth, marvel at this: God included you in the story. This good news message of Jesus Christ, heralded by angels and declared to shepherds, was also delivered to you.

"Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

This declaration is an invitation that rings out and includes you. Today, do not fear for God has given you good news of great joy! We all share in this. The good news of Jesus means peace, wholeness, security, and friendship. The invitation means freedom, hope, and love. Jesus offers a life full of meaning. This Christmas, would you accept the invitation to walk in the joy that only Jesus can bring?

This same Jesus Christ, born of a virgin, is our Lord and King. We pray you will experience the joy of an everyday relationship with him. And as you celebrate Christmas with family and friends, we pray this song will rise in your heart:

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" - Luke 2:14

Reflect:

- What does it mean that this declaration was also an invitation?
- What does it mean for Jesus to be king of your heart?
- How do you cultivate an everyday relationship with Jesus?