



LOVE
CAME
DOWN

The Best of Today in the Word Christmas

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A 12-Day Christmas Devotional
from Your Friends at *Today in the Word*

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*“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.
We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son,
who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

John 1:14

As we celebrate Christmas, we are deeply thankful for the priceless gift of Jesus, the Word become flesh. This book is dedicated to the thousands of readers who join us each day to spend time in God’s Word.



GOD'S
GIFT OF
LOVE

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.
John 1:14*

DAY ONE

Read John 1:1-14


“A Japanese pastor wrote that the most important message of Christmas is that Jesus was born as a babe, weak and vulnerable to the world,” said artist Makoto Fujimura. “A baby is utterly dependent on a mother and a father, and others helping the baby to survive. Imagine, one who would claim to be the all-powerful Creator in flesh, becoming vulnerable and dependent on fallen human beings like us!”

“The Word became flesh” (v. 14) is one of the greatest truths and greatest acts of love the world has ever known. What does it mean to call Jesus the Word or Logos (v. 1)? To the Greek mind, Logos meant reason, order, and communication, both spoken and unspoken. To the Jewish mind, it meant the word of God, including both Scripture and God’s powerful word as seen in His creation (Genesis 1).

John surely knew and intended both meanings. The miracle of the Incarnation certainly stunned both the Jewish and the Greek mind. Greeks would have been astounded to think of reason and thought as a Person, while Jews would have been staggered that the Lord of Hosts could become the man Jesus.

We too may have difficulty wrapping our minds around these truths, but John had seen it for himself (v. 14). As a man, Jesus remained the eternal Son of God (vv. 1-2). He’s the Creator (v. 3) who came to give light and life, the hope of the gospel, to all who will receive it by faith (vv. 4-5). By believing and receiving, we gain the great privilege of becoming children of God (vv. 9-13)!

God, we are overwhelmed when we consider the gift of your Son, Jesus, “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14). It is almost impossible to imagine how God took on the vulnerable form of a helpless baby. But we know that Jesus was not an ordinary baby, and so His birth is so much more than just a day to fill with food and presents. Keep us ever mindful of this miracle that changed lives for all eternity. Amen.



THE
LAMB
OF
GOD

Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.
John 1:29

DAY TWO

Read John 1:29-42

In William Blake's poem "The Lamb," a child asks the small creature, "Dost thou know who made thee?" The answer is found in the second stanza: "He is called by thy name, For he calls himself a Lamb: He is meek and he is mild, He became a little child: I a child and thou a lamb, We are called by his name."

Interestingly, in the Gospels only one person called Jesus the "Lamb of God": John the Baptist (v. 29, 36). What did John mean when he gave Jesus this title? First, Jesus would be the perfect sacrifice "who takes away the sin of the world" (see also 1 John 2:2). In addition, he may have known that Jesus would fulfill the symbolism of the Passover lamb. Just as that lamb's blood on the doorposts saved the Israelites' lives, so also Jesus' blood would bring redemption to the world.

Through God's direct revelation (v. 33) John learned that Jesus was the Messiah and that He was to be the forerunner, preparing the way (v. 30). The entire purpose of John's ministry was to reveal Jesus (v. 31). When he baptized Jesus, God publicly showed His approval (v. 32). Jesus was indeed "God's Chosen One" or the "Son of God" (v. 34)! John specifically pointed out Jesus to two of his own disciples: Andrew and, according to tradition, John. This was his way of encouraging them to follow Jesus (v. 37). Andrew went and told Peter (v. 41) who also chose to follow Jesus. Most leaders try to gather followers and not give them away, but John the Baptist was faithful and obedient to his identity and calling. He would "become less," and this was not a sad but rather a joyful thing (John 3:27-30).

Dear Lord, give us the humble spirit of John the Baptist. Help us to be less concerned about promoting ourselves. Instead, remind us that in everything we do and say, our main job is to point people to Jesus. It is our goal to "become less" so You can be glorified! This Christmas, show us ways we can glorify You. Amen.



A LIFE-
CHANGING
MESSAGE

*The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.
Isaiah 7:14*

DAY THREE

Read Matthew 1:18–25

God has often asked people to act on truths that are difficult to believe. Noah was called to build an enormous boat on dry land. Gideon was to discharge 97 percent of his army right before a major battle. Joshua was to lead a charge against a fortified city using only trumpets and shouting. But in each case, God did something significant. All He asked of His followers was to trust His promises.

Joseph found himself in a similar situation. When he discovered that Mary was pregnant, the Lord appeared to him in a dream. Their child was miraculously conceived “from the Holy Spirit” (v. 20). His name was to be “Jesus,” which in Hebrew means “the Lord saves!” (v. 21).

The book of Matthew makes clear that Jesus was the promised Messiah (1:1, 17, 18). For Jewish people in the first century, the Messiah was expected to be a warrior to free them from Roman oppression. However, the angel clarifies that Jesus was coming to “save his people from their sins” (v. 21). In the Old Testament, God promised that “He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins” (Ps. 130:8). This promise would be kept by His Son.

The birth of Jesus fulfilled prophecy. This child would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14) and would be called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6–7). He would be a descendant of David and establish a righteous kingdom (Isa. 11:1–9). Jesus was Immanuel, meaning “God with us” (Matt. 1:23). The words spoken by the prophet Isaiah, about 700 years before the birth of Jesus, clearly predicted His arrival! God fulfilled this very important promise that offers life and hope to us today.

Lord God, many years before Jesus was born, You told people about the coming Messiah. How great is Your love that You sent Your Son to die on our behalf. Today, we pray for our friends and families who need to turn their hearts to You. Amen.

DAY FOUR

Read Luke 1:26–38

Once King David was securely established on his throne, he wanted to build a temple for the Lord. God told him no, but also made a remarkable promise: “The LORD himself will establish a house for you” (2 Sam. 7:11). God’s faithful love would never be withdrawn from the line of David: “Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever” (v. 16).

And we know the rest of the story! God’s covenant with David was fulfilled in the person of Jesus, Son of David (Luke 1:32–33). The Eternal Word would become flesh, literally, in Mary’s womb (John 1:14). God would be one of us, with us—Immanuel (Isa. 7:14). The baby’s name would be Jesus, the Greek form of Joshua, meaning “the Lord saves” (Luke 1:31). He would be “the Son of the Most High” or the “Son of God,” that is, the second person of the Trinity (vv. 32, 35).

As the Messiah and a descendant of King David (see the genealogies in both Matthew and Luke), He would be given the throne of David and fulfill God’s promise (vv. 32–33). There would be no biological father, though Joseph would become Jesus’ human father. Mary was a virgin. The life inside her would be conceived by God (v. 35). This is a miracle but not necessarily that surprising, given that God is the source of all life and made the first man out of dust, the first woman out of a rib.

Mary’s response to this announcement was filled with faith, submission, and humility, despite the sheer size of the news and its unprecedented nature. Gabriel encouraged her with the reminder, “No word from God will ever fail” (v. 37).

Dear God, may we also have the humble, faithful, submissive heart of Mary. Even when we are faced with what seems like insurmountable challenges, help us to believe and trust You. May You be glorified through our lives as we place our trust in You. Amen.



MARY'S SURPRISING NEWS

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.
Luke 1:32



THE
PATH
OF
PEACE

The punishment that brought us peace was on him.
Isaiah 53:5

DAY FIVE

Read Luke 1:67-79

The dedication of a baby is a special event. On that important day, the parents and infant dress for the occasion, standing in front of the congregation while the pastor officiates. Church practices may differ, but they have a similar intent—that these little ones will know God and experience His blessing. It is a solemn moment, as parents, family members, and the church pledge to raise this child to know and love God.

Today our reading is Zechariah's song on the occasion of the birth of his son, John the Baptist. Packed with Old Testament allusions, this song is primarily about God and the coming of the Messiah. God's promises and plan of redemption had been at work throughout biblical history (vv. 68-75). Now a "horn of salvation" (v. 69) had been raised up, just as God had promised to Abraham and foretold through many prophets. This Person would serve God in perfect righteousness and bring divine mercy and deliverance to us who are helpless to save ourselves.

Zechariah's son, John, had been chosen to prepare the way with a message of repentance and forgiveness (vv. 76-77). He would be followed by the Messiah Himself, Jesus Christ (vv. 78-79). He would bring spiritual light (see Isa. 9:2) and "guide our feet into the path of peace." Peace with God would come at a high price, paid by God Himself through the death of His Son. While today's parents wish all good things for their child's future, Jesus was born at Christmas in order to be "pierced for our transgressions" and "crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isa. 53:5).

Father, thank You for Your redeeming love that gave us eternal life, joy, and peace in Christ. Help us to walk worthy of Your kingdom! There is so little peace in our world today. May we, like John the Baptist, help point people to You, the Prince of Peace. Amen.



A BABY IS BORN

*She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger.
Luke 2:7*

DAY SIX

Read Luke 2:1-7

On Christmas Eve, a special baby arrived at the Potter Park Zoo in Michigan. A male black rhino calf was delivered safely, which is significant because only 5,000 of these endangered animals remain in the wild in Africa. While we may get excited about the birth of a rare black rhino, how much better should we feel about the birth of Jesus, the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity! One birth is exciting, but the other is life changing.

So much of God's plan for history came together on Christmas Eve. Caesar took a census at precisely the right time, likely for reasons of strengthening political control and generating more tax revenue (vv. 1-3). Caesar Augustus, also called Octavian, was the great-nephew of Julius Caesar and governed for 41 years. One result of his edict was that Jesus was born in Bethlehem (not Nazareth), as had been prophesied (Mic. 5:2).

God's sovereign care was also in Mary and Joseph's young family (Luke 2:4-7). They'd gone to Bethlehem for the census because Joseph was of the line of David. They were probably planning to stay with relatives, but ended up staying where animals were kept. We only know this detail from the single mention of the "manger" or animal feeding trough in which baby Jesus was laid.

Despite all the fulfilled prophecies, the circumstances of Jesus' birth were surprising. This Christmas, let us consider each moment of this familiar story with new eyes. The Messiah was born . . . in a barn? The King would arrive . . . as the child of a poor couple? "God with us" appeared in the flesh . . . and the first witnesses were animals?

Dear God, You never fail to surprise us! As we read the Nativity story, we are struck that You work in unusual ways. Help us to be patient, to wait, to trust, and to know that You are in control and that Your ways are always best. Amen.



AN
ANGELIC
ANNOUNCEMENT

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."

Luke 2:10

DAY SEVEN

Read Luke 2:8–15

One of my grandmother's earliest memories was of the day World War I ended. When the newspapers published the news, she recounted, people ran out into the streets banging pots and pans to celebrate the end of that long, bloody war. This was good news that was worth dropping everything to celebrate!

At Christmas, we are celebrating the very best news! The birth of Jesus demonstrates God's love for us in a profound way. While Jesus was born into humble circumstances, He did have some fanfare at His arrival. An angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds working the night shift and declared, "I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord" (v. 10–11). Israel had been longing for the coming of the Messiah for generations. Had the time finally come?

The declaration of the angel was followed by a great host of angels praising God to mark the momentous occasion (v. 13–14). The shepherds "hurried off" to find Mary, Joseph, and the baby (v. 16). Upon seeing Him they had two responses. The first was to worship God (v. 20). They celebrated the fact that God had kept His promise of sending a Savior.

They celebrated the hope that Jesus embodied. Their second response was to tell others the good news. Luke tells us, "When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child" (v. 18). They had a new purpose to fulfill.

Heavenly Father, this Christmas, we celebrate with the angels, rejoicing in the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us keep You at the very center of our celebration. Our hearts are overflowing with joy and thankfulness for the indescribable gift of Your Son. Amen.



AN AUDIENCE OF SHEPHERDS

*Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace
to those on whom his favor rests.*

Luke 2:14

DAY EIGHT

Read Luke 2:16–20

The pilot episode for *The Chosen*, a popular television series depicting the life of Christ, tells the story of Simon, a poor lame shepherd. Simon longs for the coming of the Messiah. One day, he encounters Mary and Joseph and kindly gives her a drink of water. That very night, angels visit Simon and his fellow shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus. They joyfully go to find the child, and Simon is healed!

The Christmas story is for everyone, even and especially for those counted lowest in society. And that was certainly true of the shepherds in Jesus' day. One might think that when the Messiah arrived, the "important people" would be the first to know this history-making news. But God does not show favoritism, and in His world the last shall be first (Luke 13:30; Acts 10:34–35). We shouldn't be surprised, then, that shepherds were chosen as the first to receive Jesus' birth announcement (vv. 8–14). God sent an entire choir of angels to sing them the wonderful news!

It seems fitting that shepherds were the first to be told of the coming of the Good Shepherd. These particular shepherds provide a model response in at least three ways: First, they responded in faith to what they'd heard and went to find the child (vv. 15–16). Second, they rejoiced at what they'd heard and seen and spread the good news to others (vv. 17–18). Finally, they gave praise and glory to the Lord for all of it (v. 20).

Many Bible scholars believe these shepherds were watching over special flocks—animals used for the Temple sacrifices. In that case, there's a double appropriacy here: Those taking care of the "must-repeat" sacrificial animals were the first to learn that the perfect, once-for-all Sacrifice had come!

God in heaven, we are those on whom Your favor rests. Like the shepherds in Luke, we celebrate the good news of Christ's birth, proclaimed to lowly people like ourselves. May the whole world know what You have done! Amen.



A
SHINING
STAR

We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.
Matthew 2:2

DAY NINE

Read Matthew 2:1–2

What exactly was the star of Bethlehem? Using historical records and computer simulations, British astronomer Mark Thompson concluded that it was a phenomenon caused by conjunctions between the planet Jupiter (the “king of planets”) and a star named Regulus (the “king of stars”).

Such an event would have attracted the attention of the Magi, who were likely Persian scholars and astrologers. The Magi are major characters in the Christmas story, but the mysterious “Star of Bethlehem” is worth examining for its role in the good news of Christmas. First, it symbolized the mystery of following by faith. Just as Abram left home for an unknown land in obedience to God (Gen. 12:1), the Magi followed the star to an unknown land in search of a newborn king. They journeyed by faith and God saw to it that they found the Christ-child.

Second, the “Star of Bethlehem” honored God as Creator. Especially if it was a natural phenomenon, it would be an example of nature testifying about God (see Ps. 19:1–4). As the “firstborn over all creation” (Col. 1:15–17) lay as a baby in a manger, nature couldn’t help but make its own dramatic birth announcement!

As always, creation bears witness to the Lord (Rom. 1:20). Finally, the “Star of Bethlehem” fulfilled prophecy. How did the Magi know about all this? Their line of knowledge may go as far back as Balaam, who had been given a glimpse of Christmas: “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel” (Num. 24:17). Perhaps they had read Daniel or other biblical prophets through exiled Jews in Babylon. However it happened, God had clearly set eternity in their hearts (Eccl. 3:11).

How amazing are Your works, Oh God! We are mindful that You are the Creator who ordered the heavens and set each star in place. Thank You for the beautiful world You created. Thank You also for the extraordinary gift of Your Son. Amen.

DAY TEN

Read Luke 2:22–35


Our hope is in the Lord! That truth is so important, we should shout it from the rooftops. Pastor and author David Platt explained why we're compelled to spread the gospel of Christ: "[If] Jesus did rise from the dead, if Jesus alone paid the price for man's sin, and if Jesus alone conquered sin, death, and the grave, then going around the world and telling people about Jesus is the only thing that makes sense."

This is the true spirit of Christmas, as we see in Simeon's pronouncements. Forty days after the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph took her purification offering to the Temple (v. 22). They also planned to dedicate their firstborn son to the Lord (v. 23), as the Law prescribed (Ex. 13:2). There they encountered Simeon, a devout worshiper who was "waiting for the consolation of Israel" (v. 25), that is, the Messiah. The Holy Spirit had promised he'd see the Messiah with his own eyes, during his lifetime (v. 26). Mary and Joseph might have been a bit shocked by the old man who took their baby in his arms, but they could sense God at work.

Simeon's first pronouncement focused on rejoicing in hope fulfilled (vv. 29–32). "My eyes have seen your salvation"—the Messiah had finally come! God had kept His promise to Simeon and to generation upon generation of Israelites. And not only them, for the Messiah is for "all nations," including Gentiles. The Redeemer had arrived in the person of Jesus Christ!


Simeon's second pronouncement was to Mary (vv. 34–35). These words are a bit more cryptic and indicate that the Messiah will be opposed, and hearts will be revealed in how people respond to Him. Mary herself would experience deep sorrow.

Father, we have friends or loved ones who do not yet know You. We ask You to pursue and win them as You have pursued and won us. Show us how to be Your hands and feet in this work. Give us boldness to share Your plan of salvation with those who need to hear. Amen.



PROMISE OF SALVATION

My eyes have seen your salvation.
Luke 2:30



TRULY
GOD
AND TRULY
MAN

*For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind,
the man Christ Jesus.
1 Timothy 2:5*

DAY ELEVEN

Read 1 Timothy 2:5–7

What did it mean for God to become a human being? The fifth-century Creed of Chalcedon described Jesus as “perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man.” He possessed both a divine and a (sinless) human nature, “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.” Though He had two natures, He remained one Person, the “Son, and only begotten, God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In this way, Christ was perfectly positioned to be the mediator between God and humanity (v. 5). A mediator was needed because the Christmas story is part of a larger war story. We as sinners stood opposed to God; we were His enemies. But now in Christ the war is ended. Those who believe in Him are reconciled to God. We could not make peace ourselves—Christ has done it on our behalf (see Rom. 5:1–2, 9–10; Col. 1:21–22).

How did He do it? The baby placed in the manger was born to die. Jesus paid sin’s penalty and died on the cross. God raised Him from the dead, and Jesus ascended into heaven to present Himself as the offering who makes peace with God possible.

This can also be described as our “ransom” (v. 6), which at that time meant specifically the price paid to release a slave (v. 6; Matt. 20:28). We could not ransom ourselves, only God Himself could do that (see Ps. 49:7–9). Jesus didn’t just end a war; He established a peace! He is the mediator of a new and superior covenant between God and His people (Heb. 8:6; 9:15). Through Him, all who believe receive the gift of eternal life. God has called Paul and us to share this good news widely (v. 7). We are “heralds” with a message from the King!

Dear God, we are a part of a much larger story, and Christmas is about much more than the birth of Jesus. We know that Jesus is to be honored as much more than a baby in a manger. Help us to be faithful messengers for the King of kings! Amen.



THE SECOND ADVENT

This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back.
Acts 1:11

DAY TWELVE

Read Acts 1:1–11

“Every true Christian is a citizen of two worlds,” wrote Martin Luther King Jr., “the world of time and the world of eternity. We are, paradoxically, in the world and yet not of the world. . . . As Christians we must never surrender our supreme loyalty to any time-bound custom or earth-bound idea, for at the heart of our universe is a higher reality—God and his kingdom of love—to which we must be conformed.”

One of the best ways to celebrate Christ’s first Advent is to pray with keen anticipation for His Second Advent. Following His resurrection, for 40 days Jesus appeared to many people and “gave many convincing proofs that he was alive” (v. 3). As His time on earth drew to a close, He instructed His followers to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit (vv. 4–5; see Acts 2).

Jesus’ followers naturally wondered what would happen next. Some were expecting the Messiah to set up His kingdom (v. 6). He told them, however, that the time for that had not yet come (v. 7). They were to spread the good news throughout the world (v. 8). The promised Holy Spirit would be the One empowering them to carry out this mission!

When Jesus ascended into heaven, His disciples stared up into the sky, stunned (v. 10). Was this a temporary disappearance? Would He return? Two angels definitively answered this question: “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (v. 11). And here, you and I today as His church are still waiting eagerly for Christ’s return!

Lord, as we look forward to the Second Coming, we are aware that we join countless Christians in a vigil that began when You ascended. Teach us to live according to the guidance of Your Spirit. Amen.

HOW TO KNOW CHRIST

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Romans 10:13

One of the greatest truths of the Bible is that it is possible for you not only to know about Jesus but also to know Him personally as your Savior and Lord.

How can you know Christ personally? Like many relationships, it begins by responding to His invitation. Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). Jesus invites all who are weighed down by the guilt of sin to find relief. This was why He died on the cross and rose again: “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” (1 Peter 3:18). Jesus paid our debt, so we could experience forgiveness and new life through Him.

If you have not yet accepted Jesus’ invitation to know Him, why not do so now by praying this simple prayer: “Lord Jesus, thank you for dying and rising for me. I accept your gift of salvation. Amen.” God’s Word promises us that everyone who calls on Jesus’ name will be saved (Rom. 10:13). Through Him, you are a new creation! Once you have been forgiven, you can begin the great adventure of learning more about Jesus and what it means to follow Him. God speaks to us through the Bible, revealing His promises and commands. The more we read and understand, the better we know Jesus.

You are invited into a relationship. Those who know Jesus by faith also have a special relationship with God through the gift of the Holy Spirit. God’s Spirit empowers us to live a life that pleases God. Jesus said the Holy Spirit “will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26).

Knowing Jesus doesn’t stop once we accept His invitation. God’s goal for our lives is that we would be more and more like Christ. Jesus promised that when this life is over, we will be with Him forever. Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

If you have decided to follow Jesus, we’d love to know!

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