

# ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

DECEMBER 3RD -24TH



CHRISTMAS MEANS

# THE KING IS COMING



## Christmas Means The King Is Coming!

*But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; **his kingdom will never end.**" - Luke 2:30-33*

Christmas is about the coming of Jesus, the King, and the Kingdom He is bringing! This Kingdom is what all of us were created for and what we so desperately need. It was, and is, the main message of Jesus (Mark 1:15) and it is the "good news" (the Gospel) we are to tell the whole world (Mt24:14).

**Most people don't think about the Kingdom of God when they think of Christmas,** and yet during this season we all sing, "Let earth receive her King" and "Glory to the newborn King." What does all this talk about a king mean and why is it so important to the everyday struggles we have and the hope Jesus offers?

The announcement to Mary in Luke 2:30-33 is bursting with king and kingdom language from the Old Testament which includes this final promise, "... of his Kingdom there will be no end." That's a quote from 2 Samuel 7. It is a key passage of the story of God's Kingdom that was well developed in the Old Testament. Starting in Genesis, the hope of God's coming King was what God's people, like Mary & Joseph, lived for. Everything the angels announced on that "silent night" was seen in light of the coming Kingdom of God.

So, this Advent, let's take the time to study the theme of the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament that leads up to Jesus, the King of Heaven, being born on earth (at Christmas). It will help us understand why Christmas is really worth celebrating and how it truly is the greatest gift this world has ever been given. In our study, we will discover such a bigger story than we ever realized and will see that we still need Jesus the King and His Kingdom to come to us and our world just as much as they did back then.

Enjoy this daily walk through the Old Testament as I, Pastor Shawn, and other members of our Cornerstone family lead us through the story of the Kingdom of God coming to earth and into our lives. And together, may we celebrate with the angels who said that Christmas is "good news" of the kingdom of God that "brings great joy . . . for all the people." (Luke 2:10).

May it draw us to Jesus and give us an even greater reason to rejoice this Christmas!

*Pastor Shawn & Sara*

• Sunday • December 3<sup>rd</sup> •

*Welcome Lunch | After Second Service*

## "Christmas Begins at The Beginning"

*by Pastor Shawn, Lead Pastor*

***"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. <sup>3</sup> And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. <sup>4</sup> God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness." – Genesis 1: 1-4 (ESV)***

Genesis 1 tells us that the story of our world is this: it started empty with darkness covering all of it. That doesn't sound any different than today . . . just turn on the news. Yet in the midst of that darkness, the Spirit of God and the Word of God brought light and suddenly darkness didn't get to rule anymore.

When Jesus is born, He is called the light that "shines in the darkness" (John 1:6, Luke 2:32). That's what happened at Christmas: God brought light to conquer the darkness that was still trying to rule this world.

There's something else that is very important to pay attention to in these first verses: before our world existed, another Kingdom existed! God and His Kingdom created this world, and we were always supposed to be His. The world was, and is supposed to be, a lesser "kingdom" ruled and blessed by the great and loving King who has left us in charge! That's how all this starts. But as we see in these first verses, there is also a kingdom of darkness involved in this story. So, in these first few verses, we see three kingdoms: God's (light), Satan's (darkness), and our world (empty).

This is still the reality you and I live in every day. There are three kingdoms that you and I are stuck in the middle of: the Kingdom of God (that brings life and light), the Kingdom of Satan (that brings death and darkness), and the Kingdom of this World (that is empty and needy). Colossians 1:13 tells us that on Christmas day, the king was born who would eventually "*rescue us from the dominion of darkness and bring us into the kingdom [of God]*".

Christmas is a reminder that what we have needed from the beginning, we still need now – the Kingdom of God. We need its light and its life – and we can get that by receiving its King, Jesus.

Today, call on Jesus to bring light to your darkness. Invite the Spirit of God and the Word of God to bring you the light of Jesus. You are not alone. ***Write down three places you need the light of Jesus to come into this Christmas season and then ask Jesus for His peace and encouragement as His light comes. As a family, you can do the same.***

***How will you give time this Advent to invite God's Word and Spirit into your life and home this Christmas?***

• Monday • December 4<sup>th</sup> •

## "Made To Be Kingdom Partners"

by Larry Fox, Bible Teacher, Member & Former Elder & Staff

***"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" – Genesis 1:27-28 (ESV)***

It's clear from this passage that God created men and women to be like Himself with the ability to rule as He does. It also shows that His purpose in creating the earth and its creatures was to provide a domain for humanity to rule. There's no question that God can decide what He'll do and has the authority to carry it out. Likewise, every human has a similar inherent authority, which causes our decisions and actions to produce results.

The New Testament also reveals that we are the image of God; in particular, the image of His Son, Jesus. ***"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom. 8:29).*** The word "image" in this verse is a translation of the Greek word *eikon*, which means an image, portrait, or representation of something. Jesus stated that anyone who had seen Him had seen the Father (John 14:9), so as we're conformed to Jesus' image, we're also conformed to the Father's.

Romans 8:29 also describes Jesus as the "firstborn among many brothers." "Firstborn" is from the Greek word *protokos*, which is similar to our word "prototype" and means the same thing. Jesus is the first of a new series, the first member of God's human family, and the prototype for the rest of us. This means He's the standard for our nature and behavior, which is why Christlikeness is essential for Christians.

God created us in His image, gave us free will and a domain to govern, and then became our Father by bringing us into a covenant relationship with Him. As members of His family, we are royal partners with Him in His kingdom. We honor him and promote His kingdom in our earthly domain by spreading the good news Jesus brought and opposing the works of Satan's kingdom.

When Jesus returns, we'll be with Him and participate in His kingdom on earth. Adam originally ruled the earth and, in the future, Jesus will rule the earth as the second Adam and the firstborn of God's redeemed family. And we'll be kingdom partners with Him forever.

Out of love and extreme gratefulness for everything Father and Jesus have done for us, it's our privilege to offer everything we are and possess in service to Them. It's also our privilege to celebrate Jesus' birth and invite Him to reveal Himself through us, especially in this Advent season.

***Take some time to think about who and what God has given you to lead and care for. Pray that God will give you the wisdom and power to care and lead well. Pray for the family God has given you. Pray for each by name. How can you serve and lead them in such a way that they know King Jesus better this?***

***Bonus: How can you use this devotional to bring the family together for prayer and focus on Jesus?***

• Tuesday • December 5<sup>th</sup> •

## "Rejecting the King and Losing the Kingdom"

by Pastor Shawn, Lead Pastor

*<sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. <sup>5</sup> For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." <sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths." – Genesis 3:4-7 (ESV)*

Nobody wants to be given a gift that they already have. Worse yet is giving a person a BAD gift they already have! Today's passage shows how the devil has been offering the same "bad" gift for thousands of years. Satan, the ruler of the kingdom of darkness, tempts all of us with the same three lies that are reflected in 1 John 2:16. This is how the devil stole authority over the kingdom of this world from Adam and Eve (Luke 4:5-6). He offered the three lies that he still offers every person today: (1) You can be in control. (2) As long as it looks good, it is good. (3) It's all about you.

**The lie of control:** The devil convinced Adam and Eve that they needed to know good and evil for themselves. "God isn't looking out for you," Satan whispers to us. "You need to control things on your own." Satan plays on our fears, pain, and weaknesses to convince us to take control.

**The lie of appearances:** "Open your eyes, Adam, and Eve! Look around. Don't trust what God said, trust what you see." Satan is still telling us this today – look at your circumstances and judge by appearances. Social media, pop culture, political powers – everything tries to make things look great on the surface, yet we are called to walk by faith and not by sight.

**The lie of narcissism:** "It's all about you, Adam, and Eve – you're the goal. You're the most important. You should do things you want and feel." Today, our society builds laws and idols on the worship of self: what makes us the happiest. And yet, we've never been a more confused, depressed, and suicidal culture. *We are not our own savior or meaning to life.* And that is why Jesus, the Savior, came.

Jesus and the Kingdom of God invite us to the opposite. Instead of control, we surrender to Jesus who truly makes us free. Instead of appearances, Jesus invites us to know the truth that heals and empowers us. Instead of selfishness, Jesus invites us to die to ourselves and discover life in loving Him and others!

If you look closely, you will see that most of the world (and many in church) celebrate Christmas the world's way: control, appearance and selfishness. Our challenge is to experience Christmas differently. Pray that you will follow Jesus in the Kingdom of God this Christmas.

*Journal and/or discuss with your family:*

- 1) *How do I/we surrender control and lordship to Jesus this Christmas?*
- 2) *How do I/we focus more about really loving each other than what things look like?*
- 3) *How can I/we giving to others more than focus on what I/we get this Christmas?*

• Wednesday • December 6<sup>th</sup> •

*Kids Christmas Paint Night 7p*

## "The Curse on The Kingdom of This World"

*by Pastor Shawn, Lead Pastor*

*"God said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"<sup>12</sup> The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."<sup>13</sup> Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."<sup>14</sup> The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock . . . To Adam God said . . . cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it" – Genesis 3: 11-14, 17 (ESV)*

When I was growing up I usually made a mistake about what presents I thought were the best: I always thought the biggest gift must be the best gift. That's right before I even knew what was inside the present wrapped under the Christmas tree, I was judging its value by its outside appearance.

That's the lie Adam and Eve believed as well. They believed Satan's lie to take the apple because it was "pleasing to the eye" (3:6). And that sin led to a cursed world controlled by a cursed and defeated serpent. One of the characteristics of the Kingdom of this world is that it lives under the curse of death and decay. In this world, everything breaks down, people get sick, bodies wear out, relationships get broken, and society ignores injustice. As Romans 8:20-21 says, creation is bound by "frustration" and in "bondage to decay."

That's the world you and I live in and that's the world Jesus was born to save. A world that is tired, broken, and frustrated. More accurately, people like you and me who are tired, broken, and frustrated. And in the middle, of all of that, we get this (Christmas) message: ***"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ [King of Heaven] the Lord."* (Luke 2:11).**

So, this Advent season, let's slow down and invite Jesus to come into our tiredness, brokenness, and frustration. Let's not worry about appearances and what "looks" the best to other people. Let's remember we have a savior who is the King of Heaven and will provide all that we need. How can we do that?

1. Let's forgive at least one person we are frustrated with and stop rehearsing the past. Let's offer them a new beginning the way Jesus offered us a new beginning.
2. Let's cancel one extra appointment on the calendar, or one home project that can wait. Use that time to rest and focus on God and your family.
3. Let's share one place of brokenness with another believer and ask for prayer so that we don't have to carry the burden alone.

***Lord Jesus, You have rescued me from the Kingdom of this world and its curse. I praise You for it and ask that You show me and my loved ones how to receive new life, healing, and peace from You today. And show me how I can share that same grace with others.***

• Thursday • December 7<sup>th</sup> •

*Griefshare: Surviving the Holidays 6:30p*

## **"The First Verse about Christmas: *When the Savior Will Come*"**

*by King Goldman, Cornerstone's Head Elder*

***"I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed, He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel." – Genesis 3:15 (ESV)***

Did you hear that; God is speaking to this serpent, perhaps what Revelation 12:9 refers to as the great dragon of old? God, who has already created man and was satisfied with all that He made, Genesis 1:31, decides to add an "aftermarket" modification. God placed/put enmity between the woman and this serpent; suggesting that it was not there in the beginning. What does this mean? Well apparently, this serpent had already had its dose of enmity, provoking the assault on God's image-bearing creation. Therefore, we can conclude that God deemed it good to add the enmity to the woman, and then God speaks to the future of this enmity; it will be passed on to the offspring of each party involved. This enmity also comes with force and striking which will supply bruises to each party that shares the enmity; the bruising areas being significantly different in the role they play. A bruised heel can definitely affect your walk but Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE), a brain condition consequent of repeated head injuries (bruising), significantly impairs its possessor. This is God's will; the evil one be perpetually concussed.

This enmity was not just hostility about an event of disobedience but an ongoing awareness that there is an enemy of man present seeking to devour (deceitfully disinherit) man and must be subdued. This enmity was purposed to protect the man from being further deceived, which we see in latter verses is consequenced with reduced ease, i.e. "dis-ease". The enmity was the foreshadow of being born again, an "aftermarket" impartation of God into the already existing man; to keep them well and abiding under the jurisprudence of the Kingdom of Abba Father.

Brothers and sisters 1 John 3:8 informs us that Jesus, the Son of God, incarnated for the purpose of destroying the works of the devil, the great dragon of old. Jesus calls all of those who are experiencing disease in Matthew 11 to come and learn from him about the Kingdom's way of operating on earth. If we use our enmity right, submit to God, and resist the devil, we will experience the ease of the Kingdom.

***Are you storing up treasure in heaven (Matt 6:19-20)?***

***What is one place you are accepting the enemy's lies and defeat? Take authority over the enemy and ask King Jesus to come and begin to transform that situation or relationship. Don't give up and don't settle for less than God's victory and love.***

***Pray Romans 8:1-17***



• Friday • December 8<sup>th</sup> •

*Parents Night Out 6-9p*

## "Slowing Down Because The King Has Come"

*by Claudia Rees, Member & Bible Teacher*

***"Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. <sup>9</sup>Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up, He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? <sup>10</sup> The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." – Genesis 49: 7-10 (ESV)***

This portion of scripture in chapter 49 of Genesis is part of the final words that Jacob delivers from his deathbed to his twelve sons. He has a farewell message for each one of them. He begins with the oldest one and goes down the list. This deathbed message is particularly dramatic because it is prophetic. Today's passage is part of Jacob's word to his son, Judah, and is essentially a prophecy concerning the coming of Christ. We are told here that out of Judah's line, the Messiah (king) will come.

Also, the word Shiloh here means "rest and tranquility." When Jesus walked here on earth, He said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

Christmas should cause us to remember that Shiloh has indeed come! He is not only the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the King of Kings, but He is also the Passover Lamb, who laid His life down for us so that we might actually and literally have peace on earth and goodwill towards our fellowman. This is not just a holiday slogan; it is the time for us as Christians to lay our lives down for others in a way that portrays the person of our Lord to a world that is lost.

Before we get carried away with the frenetic, hurried, pressure-filled pace that 21st-century Christmas causes us to lapse into... stop! This is the time of year to make an effort to slow down, spend less on material things, spend more time with our Savior, listening, and allowing Him to guide you concerning the real needs of those around you in your community and in the church.

Keep in mind that our very lives are a gift! Without the sacrifice of our Savior, Jesus, the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" who came to this earth as a Lamb and gave His life for our salvation and reclamation, we would be lost. As it is, however, we can truly sing "Joy to the world, the Lord is come, let earth receive her King, and let every heart prepare Him room!"

***Thank you, Lord, that Your very life here on earth is our living example of what true loving and real giving are all about. Help us to take time to remember every day what has been done for us and pass it on to others in thought, word, and deed! Amen.***

• Saturday • December 9<sup>th</sup> •

*Spanish Ministry Christmas Celebration 6p*

## "The First Time God Is Called King"

*by Lynn Murphy, Member & Intercessor*

*"Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying, 'I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. 2 The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. 3 The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is his name. 4 Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea, and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea. 5 The floods covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone. 6 Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy. 7 In the greatness of your majesty you overthrow your adversaries; you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble. 8 At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up; the floods stood up in a heap; the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.'" – Exodus 15:1-8 (ESV)*

As we reflect on this beautiful song Moses wrote praising the Lord for His deliverance from the armies of Pharaoh and the enslavement of Egypt, we find the culmination in verse 18, *"The LORD shall reign forever and ever."*

When I read the title of this devotion, my first thought was that the word king is not mentioned in these verses. However, the Hebrew words for king and reign are nearly identical, and the acknowledgment of God as King is woven throughout the song. The one who reigns is the sovereign (king) and exhibits sovereignty over his kingdom.

In these turbulent times, the knowledge that God is sovereign and reigns over all brings hope and stability recognizing that nothing is outside of His control. His command can part the seas or close them. A word spoken by God can change any circumstance. Our God is unlike any other king. The appropriate response to the King is to bow in His presence, yet our King invites us to come confidently before His throne of grace to find help in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16). We give our majestic King the reverence that is due, but we also delight that He calls us to draw near. Our King holds each of us in His loving hands and nothing can touch us without His permission.

Several years ago, I was introduced to the ancient teaching technique of stringing pearls. Throughout Scripture, words and ideas are repeated. Each new occurrence helps give fuller meaning to interpret other verses. While each understanding in itself is a valuable pearl, if you string these pearls together, verse upon verse, the result is magnificent.

Although I was unfamiliar with the first mention of the Lord's reign as King in Exodus, the last occurrence in Revelation 19:16 is well known. The heavens are opened and a rider on a white horse appears with a sword in His mouth. On His robe and on His thigh, He has a name written, "KING OF KING AND LORD OF LORDS." While the reference to God as King is somewhat veiled in Exodus, there will be absolutely no question of His reign and dominion in Revelation.

*If you have time to discover a few more pearls, these verses including reign or king help us gain a fuller picture of our sovereign and eternal King: 2 Chronicles 20:6; Psalm 2; 24:8-10; 93:1-2; 103:19; Isaiah 6:5; Matthew 5:34-35; Rev 11:15-17; 15:3-4.*

*Where are you losing hope? Have you forgotten God is sovereign and reigns over all? Use the scripture above to declare God's power and new beginnings over those places.*

• Sunday • December 10 •

*Kids Christmas Program In Service*

**"You Are To Be a Kingdom of Priests"**

*by Ashley Chavez, Chi Alpha Missionary to VCU*

***"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."* –Exodus 19:4-6**

We saw earlier in this devotional how we were created to be kingdom partners with God since the beginning (Gen 1:27-28). One of the ways we were designed to partner with Him is as a kingdom of priests as seen in this passage. What does that mean? A priest would act as an intermediary, or spokesperson, from the people to God and often from God to the people. This was an essential role in ancient Israel, as *only* the priests would be allowed into what was called the holy of holies where the very presence of God dwelt amongst His people. In order to do so, a priest needed to consecrate himself, or make themselves holy through rituals before being permitted to enter. Then, they were able to offer necessary sacrifices on behalf of people's sins and intercede through prayer. They were the necessary go-between for the people and God.

The issue arises when time and time again, not only do the people fall in sin, but the priests would too. Even the very first high priest, Aaron, failed to obey the first of the ten commandments (Exodus 32:1-8), Aaron's sons would also violate God's commands, and on and on it goes. So how are we meant to be a kingdom of priests? This seems an impossible task at this point of the story as we, ourselves, are in need of a better priest. We are left awaiting this priest until Jesus enters the story.

While this might not be the most prominent title ascribed to Jesus, we see through His life, ministry, and death that Jesus Himself fulfills all the duties of the priest perfectly. He is the ultimate spokesperson on behalf of God, He is the Word (John 1), and He is God himself! He represents us perfectly, fully human, and yet: without sin. He intercedes on our behalf through prayer. And finally, He offers a perfect and final sacrifice, Himself. When Jesus dies, we see the veil that separates the holiest place where God dwells torn in two (Matt 27:51). Now, God's presence is not confined to the temple. It's not even confined to the Israelites. But now, God's presence is available to all people all across the Earth because of Jesus! And it is not only accessible, but God will place His very Spirit inside us, the believer (Acts 2). WE are now the new temple. WE are now the place where God dwells. And by His Holy Spirit, He empowers us again to be a holy, royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:4-10). Our job then is to represent God to the world around us by living holy and set apart. We intercede through prayer, and we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice, just as our high priest Jesus did.

***Give thanks to God for sending Jesus to be our perfect high priest, and for showing us how to live as His royal priesthood. Ask that He would empower us to live holy and set apart so that we can be a light to those in a dark world. How might we live as living sacrifices to the Lord as this Christmas season approaches? What is the sacrifice you can give to the Lord so others might see Him through you?***

• Monday • December 11<sup>th</sup> •

## "God's King Is Different"

by Pastor Kenny Mason, Pastor of Young Adults & Member Care

*"When you come to the land that the Lord your God is giving you, ... you may indeed set a king over you whom the Lord your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you...when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by[a] the Levitical priests. <sup>19</sup> And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, <sup>20</sup> that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel." – Deuteronomy 17: 14-20 (ESV)*

Christmas time is here! The joy, the decorations, the gifts, the excitement, and so much more. From the sweet cookies that we bake to the sweet time we get to spend with each other as a family, there is so much to appreciate that we have. There's so much to be thankful for; however, it can be very easy to look at what someone else has in their yard, a gift that they received, or the family structure that they have and not desire what we see. Through this passage, we can learn that when God blesses us with something, He will always set us apart from the rest of the world so we can truly represent Him and His Kingdom. As we eagerly await the celebration of Christ's birth during this advent season, let us reflect upon the message found in direct relevance to the life and teachings of our King Jesus.

Jesus, the Prince of Peace, embodied all of the demanded qualities perfectly. His humble birth in a humble stable, surrounded by shepherds and animals, serves as a powerful reminder of the spirit of humility. Despite His divine nature, Jesus chose to live a simple life while teaching us the importance of humility and showing compassion to all, regardless of their social status. Moreover, Jesus was faithful to God's commandments, fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament and ushering in the fulfillment of God's plan for His true Kingdom to arrive. He was who every king on earth was supposed to be. Instead of simply knowing God's Word, He was God's Word come to rule and reign over our hearts and lives.

Before you pray, take some time to reflect on your Savior, King Jesus. Reflect on how he perfectly fits the description of the true King that the Israelites needed and the true King that you need today. Be content with the multiple spiritual blessings in heavenly places that you already have according to Ephesians 1:3. Let this Holiday season truly be a reflection of the beautiful gift that was given to you in that Bethlehem manger.

*Lord Jesus, thank You for the precious gift of Your kingdom here on earth and the example that You gift to me as the true King this world needs. Will You help me strive to emulate humility, faithfulness, justice, and righteousness in my life as You have? I approach the celebration of Your birth with my heart filled with gratitude towards my neighbor. Help me to appreciate the gifts and the people You have placed around me. As I gather with family and friends, help me boldly share the message of Your grace and the transformative power of Your love to bring hope and joy during this Christmas season.*

*What are some ways that you can live a consecrated life so that your friends and family can recognize the kingdom of God?*

• Tuesday • December 12<sup>th</sup> •

## "Choosing to The King So We Can Be Like Him"

By Rev. Kim Larson, Member & Bible Teacher

*"But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the Lord. <sup>7</sup> And the Lord said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. <sup>8</sup> According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you." – 1 Samuel 8: 6-8 (ESV)*

Even the warning from Samuel of what the king would demand from them did not dissuade them. Their answer was still "No, but there shall be a king over us that we also may be like all the nations." 1 Sam 8:19,20.

So, they rejected God from being their king because they wanted to look like everyone else, instead of a nation set apart for God. There was a saying a few years ago used in an advertisement 'Image is everything'. I don't remember what it was about, but the message has a strong pull. If we are concerned about what others think of us, I think we are going to make the wrong choices. Israel, in choosing image, (looking like the world), chose wrong.

A song I remember singing many years ago is "Love is the flag flown from the castle of my heart when the King is in residence there." Then for love, you sing joy, then peace, so on the song goes. Philippians 3:20 tells us we are citizens of heaven, and we can be good citizens or bad. Obey the laws or not (Ouch, did someone hit me on the back of my head with a speed limit sign?) Like the Israelites, we can still choose Him and His ways or choose a different image, one that takes us down a different path than what God wants for us.

Now there is an image we should want to be like, one that is everything. We are being changed into the image of the Lord by the Spirit, 2 Cor.3:18. From glory to glory we are changed, not primarily in how we look, but in how we respond. We have been translated from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of Light. That is quite a change, now we need to work it out. When I say work it out, I mean in the Spirit. There isn't any change unless the Spirit does it and we are willing to go along with Him.

There is no shortage of people and things wanting us to take on their image or message this time of year or any other time of year. Let us focus on whose image we want others to see in us.

We celebrate the coming of the King of Kings. A King who gave of Himself for the benefit of all.

***Let us also give ourselves (His image) for the glory of His Kingdom.***

***This is a great day to make sure we aren't taking on the attitudes and priorities of the world around us. We want to be in God's image and heart. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to show you one attitude that needs to change today. Then ask the Holy Spirit to show you one way to live out the opposite for God's glory.***

• Wednesday • December 13<sup>th</sup> •

*Kids Bible Quiz Christmas Party 7p*

## *“Christmas Fulfillment: David is Promised a King Forever”*

*by a Missionary to Israel*

*“from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. <sup>12</sup> When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup> I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, <sup>15</sup> but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.” – 2 Samuel 7:11-15 (ESV)*

I love the mysteries of GOD, don't you? In this Scripture, there speaks of a BIG ONE!

Here we read that the LORD, Himself, promises David, ‘the man after GOD’s own heart’, that He will set a seed on his throne from his own body and that He would establish David’s kingdom for him, forever. Wow, what a promise!!! In the natural, it looks like the LORD was incorrect in His promise to David. Why? Because, if we follow David’s line, his own son, Solomon, wasn’t even faithful to the LORD, like his father David was, and most of it only gets worse from there. We later read that David’s kingdom was eventually divided. Certainly, the LORD was not thinking of only physical fulfillment in His promise to David.

Within the text, we also read: Who was this precious gift of a seed that GOD was promising to David? A mystery is unveiled as GOD reveals that it is His Own Son, Jesus, Who will be the One to establish David’s throne, forever. And in this promise to David, we read another mystery about you and me. WE, who are GOD’s Family, His possession, are also part of the house that Jesus is building! WE are part of the gift of GOD as He is establishing David’s throne through His Son, the Jewish seed, for FOREVER!!! WOW!!! What a GREAT Mystery, eh???

The Father promised His Son, not only to David but also to us, to save us from anything that would separate us from Him. Our Father gave His Son to us freely, simply because He Loves us.

*Dear Lord, we could never thank You enough for sending us Your Son. From His humble birth in Bethlehem to His glorious ascension from Jerusalem, He has shown us clearly Who YOU are. You are a GIVER. Make us like YOU, Lord, please, make us like You.*

**A Giving Question: *Is there something in your life that you are holding on to that prevents you from giving without expecting anything in return?***

Looking Ahead: *Sunday, December 17<sup>th</sup> is our “BIG” Christmas offering.  
Be praying about what the Lord is calling you to give above and beyond your tithe.*

• Thursday • December 14<sup>th</sup> •

**"God's Kingdom is Everlasting"**  
by Winston Rodriguez, *Cornerstone Elder*

*The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made. <sup>10</sup> All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your saints shall bless you! <sup>11</sup> They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom and tell of your power, <sup>12</sup> to make known to the children of man your[a] mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. <sup>13</sup> Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. [The Lord is faithful in all his words and kind in all his works.]" – Psalm 145: 9-13 (ESV)*

December is a month of celebration for many, but it's also a dangerous month for others.

The time of the year when individuals are most depressed and most likely to commit suicide is during the Christmas season. This is due to the incredible pain experienced by those who have had dreadful family experiences or lost family members, recalling only the celebrations of better times.

If you feel lost and sad during this bittersweet period, take comfort in these words from the psalmist:  
"Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom... Psalm 145:13.

We live in a decaying world filled with the abandonment of virtue, righteousness, and personal integrity; in all this chaos, you may feel lost and trapped, perhaps making this everlasting kingdom seem so far away.

God has provided a way to live in this world and not be contaminated by the degrading pressures evil agents spread throughout it. You can live a virtuous, productive, righteous life. **"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."** (John 16:33). I believe the statements made by Jesus "...I have overcome the world.", gives reassurance of the everlasting kingdom still to come.

What does this everlasting kingdom look like, you may ask; the book of Revelation 21:21 says, **"And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass"**. You could think God is exaggerating, but He's not; this everlasting kingdom will be like nothing we've ever seen beyond our earthly ability to comprehend.

***Would you take some time now to thank God for this everlasting kingdom He has prepared for you?***

***I pray that the Holy Spirit comes alongside all willing to be comforted and encouraged by God's Spirit. And during this difficult time of the year, we find hope—that our consolation is in the Spirit of God, available to all who trust in Jesus Christ as Lord. Amen.***

Looking Ahead: You can serve at the CRC Christmas Store tomorrow or Saturday.  
Call the church office for more information: 804-748-8613

• Friday • December 15<sup>th</sup> •

CRC Christmas Store Set Up 1-4p | Shift Movie Night 6p | Mom's Christmas Party 6p

**"Christmas Fulfillment: *Immanuel, God With Us!*"**

*by Pat Hein, Cornerstone Elder*

***"Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." – Isaiah 7:14 (ESV)***

For hundreds of years, Israel had watched and waited for the Messiah, their Savior. They knew the Scriptures and had read that a virgin would conceive and bear a son, Immanuel. But when He arrived, few recognized the miraculous fulfillment of this Scripture or the significance of His name, Emmanuel, God with Us. They were busy leading their lives in a time of uncertainty and danger. So many missed the meaning of the wonderful gift of God with Us and the new Kingdom He brought.

Over two thousand years have passed. We now live busy lives in uncertain and dangerous times. It is now as important a time as ever to recognize and seek this Kingdom of God, of God with us. This Kingdom is certainly not like those of men that we have seen throughout history. This kingdom speaks of freedom in and through Christ. It speaks of healing, transformation, mercy, grace, unconditional love, and most of all, it speaks of hope and eternal life.

May we stop to ponder the fulfillment of the Scripture of our precious Lord being born of a virgin. May it not be so hackneyed an idea that we miss the wonder of it or of the fact that as Christians, we are part of the Kingdom of God. Let us revel in the mystery and purpose in our hearts to properly re-present this wonderful God with Us, God within us, to those who do not know Him. The world needs Jesus and His Kingdom. The Lord has given to us the ministry of reconciliation, of introducing many to this marvelous King and His Kingdom of Love.

***Let us pray that He will lead us to many this season to whom we may properly re-present His love, grace, mercy, and hope and invite them to become, with us, citizens of heaven.***

**Prayer Points:**

- *Is there a place where you feel alone and forgotten? Jesus, the King, is with you!*
- *Is there a person you know who feels alone or forgotten? Reach out to them today. Invite them to this Sunday's service, Christmas Eve, or a personal time to catch up.*
- *Is there a problem that your family is facing? Pray that the family would remember and turn to Jesus for the answer.*

Looking Ahead: *Don't forget to reserve your seats for Christmas Eve Service!*  
*You can reserve them at [cornerstone.ag/christmas](http://cornerstone.ag/christmas)*



•Saturday • December 16<sup>th</sup> •

CRC Christmas Store 12-4p | Young Adults Christmas Party 7p

*"Christmas Fulfillment: People Walking in Darkness Saw a Great Light"*  
by TyRenzo Morton, Young Marrieds' Leader

*"But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. <sup>2</sup>The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone."* – Isaiah 9: 1-2 (ESV)

Imagine walking through your home at night without any lights or driving at night without headlights. Without some form of light, we are blind. We would take steps based on assumption, but our assumption may not always lead us in the right direction. As imperfect people, living in an imperfect world, amongst others who are imperfect, we need a source of guidance and direction. We learn from our own mistakes, and we learn from the mistakes of others, but our knowledge and experience on earth is limited.

As humans born into sin, we were never capable of saving ourselves, but thank God that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the light on our behalf. He took our sins and used His own body as a sacrifice to save our souls and instructed us to pick up our cross and follow Him.

By allowing Jesus to be the light in our lives we can use that light to guide us out of darkness. We can use that light to expose the deception and lies of the enemy to discern the tricks and schemes of the devil. We can shine the light on ourselves to expose the things we need to allow Jesus to change as imperfect beings, and we can shine that light on others to help them identify who they are in Christ.

The best part about this light is that the battery will never die, we would never need to recharge this form of light. This form of light runs 24 hours a day and we can trust that He will lead us in the right direction.

*Prayer point: Lord, I give myself to You, as You gave Yourself to me. Teach me Your ways, so I can walk in the light and shine the way You have called me to shine.*

*Giving Question: What are some things that you can do here on earth to be a light to others? During this Christmas season, how can you be a blessing to someone else?*

*Looking Ahead: Prepare your Christmas Offering for tomorrow's service (8:30, 9:45, & 11:15a).  
You can also give online at [cornerstone.ag/give](https://cornerstone.ag/give)*

• Sunday • December 17<sup>th</sup> •

*BIG Christmas Offering | Three Services 8:30a 9:45a 11:15a*

## **"Christmas Fulfillment: For Unto Us a Child Is Born"**

*by Edgar Ruiz, Cornerstone's Vertical Youth Director*

***"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup>Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this." – Isaiah 9: 6-7 (ESV)***

As we approach this Christmas season, I am approaching a brand-new season in my personal life: the season of Fatherhood. As my wife and I are expecting a baby girl around the Christmas season, we are faced with both a sense of joy and excitement, as well as fear and chaos. We're expecting our beautiful blessing with great joy and excitement, but we are also nervous as this is new to both of us. I'm sure I'm not the only one who is met with chaos during the Christmas season. With all the shopping, decorating, planning, and possibly driving to far locations in order to visit family and friends, the Christmas season can be one of the busiest and most chaotic seasons of the year.

However, it is in seasons like these that Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, comes in and brings a peace that we cannot understand. As we've been talking about the three Kingdoms (God, World, Satan), we remember that one of the characteristics of the Kingdom of God is that it is a Kingdom of Peace. While the other two focus on chaos and worry, the Kingdom of God always brings peace in the midst of chaos.

Isaiah 9:7 says that the Prince of Peace will establish His Kingdom from this time forth and forevermore. This means that even today, we can have access to the peace of God. The peace that surpasses all understanding. When we choose to live every day in the Kingdom of God, we live knowing that we have His peace in the midst of our chaos. No matter how great our chaos may seem, His peace is always far greater.

As you read this today, walk in the peace of God. Regardless of what the day may hold, or what this season has in store, remember that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is walking with you.

***"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths." – Proverbs 3:5-6***

***Lord, help us set our eyes on You in this season. Remind us that Your peace is far greater than any worry, fear, or chaos this season may bring. Let us surrender our own understanding, and may we experience a greater sense of Your peace throughout this Christmas season.***

• Monday • December 18<sup>th</sup> •

## "His Dominion Is Everlasting"

by Diane Huff, Cornerstone Elder

*"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. <sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." – Daniel 7:13-14*

The book of Daniel is an important bridge between the historical accounts of the Old Testament and the coming of the Messiah in the New Testament. To understand much of what we read in the gospels, it is important to understand the prophecies of the Old Testament and how Jesus fulfilled them.

In Mark 8:31, Jesus refers to Himself by the prophetic title "Son of Man," acknowledging that He is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel 7:13. This title also acknowledges His humanity. Daniel's prophetic reference to Jesus coming on the clouds of heaven points to His divinity, since in the Old Testament heavenly clouds represent divinity, majesty, and awesome presence. Remember the accounts in the Old Testament of the cloud over Mt. Sinai, the cloud by day leading the Israelites out of Egypt, the cloud filling the Temple after Solomon dedicated it. The Son is presented to God the Father (Ancient of Days) and given all authority, glory, and sovereign power, including the power formally held by Gentile kingdoms (v. 14). His dominion is over all peoples and nations, is everlasting and will never be conquered or destroyed.

Jesus is the fulfillment of this prophecy in Daniel and the fulfillment of God's Kingdom on earth. He will come again to defeat the powers of darkness and establish His millennial reign on earth (Rev.20:1-6). At the end of 1000 years, He will surrender the millennial kingdom and will be appointed Ruler over God's eternal kingdom (1 Cor. 15:24), and His kingdom will know no end. He is and will always be sovereign (1 Cor. 15:26-27). This is the best gift and promise we can receive!

During this season, the Son of Man is asking you to give to Him. He has given Himself, fulfilled Scripture, and established a heavenly kingdom for all who want to be claimed as His. ***If you haven't already, are you willing to give Him your heart, to surrender all to Him? If you already know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, let this be a season to rededicate hearts and lives to Him, to give Him honor and praise. By giving our time, talent, and earthly treasures, our lives can reflect our love for Him in appreciation of all He's given us. And we can worship Him forever, together.***

***Lord Jesus, You are sovereign and in You, we find fulfillment of all the promises of Messiah in Scripture. We thank You for Your Word that so beautifully illustrates who You are and all You've done for us. Help us to have giving hearts as we remember and appreciate all You've done and will do for us. We love You and give You all our worship forever! Amen.***

• Tuesday • December 19<sup>th</sup> •

## "Waiting for 'that day' when Jesus is King over it all"

by Pastor Shawn, Lead Pastor

*"And the Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day the Lord will be one and his name one."*  
– Zechariah 14:9 (ESV)

Part of Christmas shopping is waiting – waiting for what we ordered online to come in. We've found what we wanted or needed. We've paid the price and now we wait for the gift to come.

On the day Jesus was born, God sent His son to pay for what He wanted and what we needed! Five hundred years before Jesus, Zechariah looked at his broken world and God's people who were tired, broken, and frustrated, and the Holy Spirit filled him to declare the words of 14:9. One day God Himself "will be king over all the earth." "On that one day," there won't be any confusion about who Jesus is and what He wants. One day the King will come again and eventually, we live in a world that should be exactly what was supposed to be all along. On that day, man's failed efforts for peace will finally be over.

In the book, "Kingdom of God", Dr. John Bright says, "All of the world's history shows us that we need the King and His Kingdom of God to come. History is a warning that our best is not good enough . . . that we will never be right by ourselves and we need a higher righteousness, some greater kingdom, or we will perish. History points us to the Kingdom of God and tells us we need it."

On Christmas, Jesus came to pay for what we need. When He comes again, we will finally have it! Until that day, we wait. We wait for the greatest gift of all – an eternity living in the light and love of King Jesus. One day when there are no more tears, no more death, and the world is right and injustice is no more.

In the final chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22, we see that future gift. Three times in that chapter it says:

*"Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book." (v7)*

*"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. <sup>13</sup> I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. (v12-13)*

*"He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." (v20)*

*This Christmas, how does knowing that Jesus is coming, change the way you live, love, and lead others?*

- 1. If Jesus is coming soon, how should you give to others this Christmas?*
- 2. If Jesus is coming soon, how should you forgive others this Christmas?*
- 3. If Jesus is coming soon, how should you invest your time this Christmas?*

*Lord Jesus, show me how to keep focused on Your promise to return. Help it change the way I live today and go through this Christmas season. Amen.*

• Wednesday • December 20<sup>th</sup> •

*Vertical Youth Christmas Party & Talent Show 7p*

## "Last Old Testament Word of God as King"

*by Rev. Jamal Riley, Board Member & Greater YMCA Chaplain*

*"For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. <sup>12</sup> But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. <sup>13</sup> But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says the Lord of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the Lord. <sup>14</sup> Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations." – Malachi 1:11-14 (ESV)*

The Judeans had experienced many victories through God's power. He allowed them to return to the Promised Land after they had been exiled. Through God's power, He helped them overcome many obstacles and rebuilt the Temple and Jerusalem. The Judeans should have been grateful and remembered God's grace and their victory over their circumstances, but they soon returned to their old sinful nature of doing things their own way. God had to remind the Judeans of their shortcomings by not accepting their less-than-appropriate and blemished animal sacrifices/offerings, while they kept the best animals for themselves. God is not mocked. How often have we given less than what is expected of us? In the New Testament, God has graced and gifted us with the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ (**Matthew 2:18**), who has gifted and given us salvation over our obstacles of sin, death, guilt, and shame (**Matthew 27:50-51**). Let's recall the Judeans and not repeat the same mistakes by offering our sacrifices with an ungrateful heart. We are to give our best because God didn't hold back on His blessing/gift to us.

Today, let's be intentional about giving our best to our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit to make us aware of the space He creates for us to impart "light" in our dark world. Look for opportunities to share His love that was given to you, help someone by planting seeds of hope that God will bloom, and do good for someone in need. Matthew 25:42-45 clearly shares whatever we have done or given to the least; you have done unto God.

*Father, thank You for reminding us that You are God, You gave us Your very best and there is no one like You. Let us stay faithful to You and Your ways as we continue to love, serve, and care for all people.*

*Be blessed.*

Looking Ahead: *Don't forget to reserve your seats for Christmas Eve Service!*  
*You can reserve them at [cornerstone.ag/christmas](http://cornerstone.ag/christmas)*

• Thursday • December 21<sup>st</sup> •

## "His Kingdom, There Shall Be No End"

by Camille Murchie, College Student

*"And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."— Luke 1:30-33*

"And of his kingdom there will be no end." What hopeful words. I can remember many times in my life where I have wondered "When will \_\_\_\_\_ end?" In school, it may have been during a treacherous math course. On a more serious note, I may have angrily asked myself "When will this end?" after hearing about pain, suffering, or violence in my city. In Mary's time, she (and those around her) must have been looking at the Roman oppression they were living under saying "When will this end?"

Maybe there is something in your life that you are looking at this Advent season, weary and discouraged, saying "When will this end?"

There is hope, friend. The angel's message to Mary tells us of a Ruler whose Kingdom *will* bring an end to everything that is making your soul weary. In Revelation 21:4, we are assured that this same baby boy will be the Restorer of all creation; that ***"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."***

In His Kingdom, tears *will* end.

Death *will* end.

Mourning *will* end.

Pain *will* end.

But to **His Kingdom**— there will be *no* end.

Darkness will end. **The Light of the World will not.**

So, let's celebrate this everlasting Kingdom today. Rather than anticipating all the worries of tomorrow, let us give **Jesus** all of our anticipation. Let us actively anticipate His movement, His peace, His power, and His renewal. And ultimately, let us daily anticipate His Kingdom that will have no end.

*Jesus, thank you for Your promise that this world is not the end. God, what an unshakeable hope I have found in You! Nothing can take away the promise of eternity with You. Beyond what I feel and see, may I fix my eyes on the Great Restorer. I give You every worry I am bringing into today, anticipating how You will display Your glory as I trust in You. I love You, Lord. Amen.*

• Friday • December 22<sup>nd</sup> •

## "This King Shall Save His People From Their Sins"

by Bill Janosik, Member & Leader of Conquerors For Christ

*And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." – Matthew 1:19-21 (ESV)*

Imagine for a minute being Joseph. What went through his mind? This young woman who was going to be his wife was with child, and it wasn't his. Can you put yourself in his shoes? Joseph was thinking of ways he could resolve this situation. Surely this young lady had been unfaithful, but Joseph being a righteous man, didn't want her to be humiliated.

Joseph was a descendant of King David, a man with deep integrity. He was a man who was very sensitive to the guidance of God and willing to do God's Will no matter what that meant. Joseph pondered all the possibilities and based on Jewish law, he could have decided to "bow out" of the betrothal and give the reasons to the judges. I mean, even Mary was trying to figure out how to explain this to others. Joseph initially began to secretly end the betrothal. However, he dwelled on this decision and took the time to pray about what he believed before deciding. As humans, we're inclined to rapidly want to fix things and move on, but he was patient and waited for clarity. Joseph's mind was spinning on what the right decision would be when in his dream, the Angel of the Lord appeared and said: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins". (Note: The expression "saved from sins" occurs only in Matthew 1:21, It's NOWHERE ELSE in the entire Bible!!).

Joseph's actions provide valuable lessons. Trusting the angel's message teaches us to rely on God's wisdom rather than our limited understanding. Our mortal feelings are inadequate for assessing the rightness or wrongness of significant actions. Obedience to God's guidance leads us to the divine path designed for our lives. Joseph's humble profession as a carpenter highlights that God values trustworthiness over social status when blessing the righteous. All of this took place to fulfill what the Lord had prophesied generations before to Abraham.

Jesus's birth carried more significance than can ever be humanly expressed. To put it bluntly, it was THE way for God to "right the ship". He gave people the freedom of thought and action, and that freedom led them in ways that could only lead to death. They needed a Savior and Jesus is the one who shows all of humanity exactly how we should live.

***Prayer: "Lord please let us remember the miracles that surrounded the virgin birth and the miracles of the gift of Jesus to help us see the light in this world. Please forgive this world and let us see the glory that's still here every day. Let us see how much power we have through YOU and let us not be dismayed. For we can only change Your land through You and what You taught us. Please keep us focused on our next steps as a people so that we may change this world back to being more like You".***

• Saturday • December 23<sup>rd</sup> •

## "You Are A Reflection of God's Light in Your Life"

by Kennedy Coffin, High School Junior

*"Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." <sup>7</sup> Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." – Matthew 2: 2-8 (ESV)*

There are people who are searching for Jesus, even if they don't truly know who they seek. Like the wise men fervently chasing and following the light of the Star, there are people in our lives who desire to find the Light of Christ but are unsure of what they're looking for. Our job as Christians is not to be the Light that they chase, but a reflection of it. That Light, which is Jesus Christ, is both never-ending and all-consuming. To be a reflection of the love of God in others' lives, we have to be **"living in the light as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other"**(1 John 1:7). To reflect God's Light, we must also be allowing God to fill us in order to shine, like a mirror. A mirror needs to be covered in light to be useful, and for others to see a reflection in it. Similarly, we must also be filled with Light for others to see God working in and through us. As we are surrounded by darkness in the world, it is our job as individuals to be a reflection of God's Light on Earth, not the Light itself. There is a clear distinction between trying to be the Light and being a mirror in a dark place- one causes burnout, and the other fills us entirely.

While there will be people, like Herod, who try to stop us from being God's Light or attempt to lead others down the wrong path, it is not our job to disarm them or even protect ourselves. God is in control of every situation, and our job is to simply follow His directions, like Mary and Joseph. They stayed in the place that God chose for them and obediently waited for His guidance in making any decision, never impacted by fear they must have felt. Sometimes, it can be tempting to think that it is your job to fight every battle, or that you must only attract and bring others to Christ. However, it is not always God's plan for you to fight the Herods of the world, or to be the Star in someone's life. God wills us to wait. To stay where He has placed us until we have fulfilled His purpose, and to live according to the Word, so that we may be a reflection of Christ Jesus.

***Something to pray: God, allow me to be patient, and to reflect Your Light into other's lives. Give me the ability to hand over my battles to You, and to wait where I am needed. Help me to understand how I can be a better reflection of You in other's lives. Amen.***

***Something to think about: What have you been giving to the Lord? Have you offered yourself to Him to be a reflection of Light to others, or handed Him control? What have you given recently in order to be a better reflection of God?***



• Sunday • December 24<sup>th</sup> •

*Christmas Eve Morning Service 10a | Christmas Eve Services 4:30p & 6P*

**"Wise Men Worship the King"**

*by Matt Coffin, Cornerstone Elder*

***"After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> 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 2:9-11 (ESV)**

Magi knew their history, and their prophecy and kept an expectancy watching for the signs and the season. So, when the foretold celestial sign appeared, the magi mobilized and moved. This starry sign had endurance, momentum, and proximity to what it was predicting. Along their faith-filled travels, we know that their catalyzing sign disappeared from sight.

Yet, these men of renown pressed on in faith, being fully certain of their history, their season, their purpose, and their sign. Scholars believe that an entourage of magi, not just three, drew the attention of villagers and the eyes of a local king. It was a determined focus that inspired this group's efforts, will, and their sacrifice.

However, what is key in this journey is their obedience. You see, something in them purposed to seek, worship, and deliver gifts fit for a king. The heavens had, in fact, declared the glory of God, and the earth would soon declare the work of His hands. The Messiah had come.

As they obediently continued east, signs faded, and the sky went starless. However, they continued their pursuit. Along the way, the starry sign reappeared and seemed to rest yet clearly illuminate the very place they had traveled so far to reach. The star's reappearance was met with such joy and celebration that the original Greek can hardly translate the multiple types of joy expressed in the passage (exceeding joy). These weary travelers would bow in the Messiah's presence, as their gifts were presented. These were no small gifts either. Gifts fit for a king were provided in good measure. They were gifts that provided for a journeying young family's living expense (gold), commemorated a life of holiness (frankincense), and prepared for a death to come (myrrh- embalming spices). Each gift had value, meaning, and purpose for the journey ahead. Finally, we know that extraordinary faith, obedience, and effort culminated in the delivery of these gifts.

***Lord, let the word of God (the Bible) teach us, let Your signs signal our obedience, and may your Holy Spirit empower a fervent focus even when everything, but our faith has disappeared from sight. – Amen***

- 1. Will we give Him the gift of faith-filled expectation and exceeding joy, once again?***
- 2. Will we give our time, our talents, and our treasures as gifts of humble worship?***

• Monday • December 25<sup>th</sup> •

## "The Biggest Christmas Surprise of All"

by Pastor Shawn, Lead Pastor

*"And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.' <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!'" – Luke 2:8-14 (ESV)*

What's the most surprising Christmas gift you ever received? Did someone give you a gift you never thought they could afford to give you? Did you receive a gift you never thought you could ever have? Did someone you love show up on Christmas when you didn't think they would be able to be with you?

In his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, CS Lewis shared that before he became a believer, his biggest problem was this: how is it possible for humans to know their Creator? Lewis used the example of the character Hamlet in Shakespeare's play. He wondered, "How could Hamlet ever know Shakespeare, his creator? Lewis believed it was impossible for the created to know the creator.

But then Lewis realized there was a way for Hamlet to "meet" his creator! It would be possible if Shakespeare wrote himself into his own play. Hamlet could meet Shakespeare if Shakespeare wrote himself into Hamlet's story!

That is exactly what happened on the first Christmas. God "wrote" Himself into our story and entered our world. The Gospel of John says, "The Word" came into our darkness. The angels in the Gospel of Luke declare that this was news of great joy for all people. There was good news that the God who created us was now with us. The King was finally here. And that King would be the most surprising gift anyone had ever received because:

- In the weakness of a little baby, God would lift the burdens of His people (*Isaiah 9:4*)
- On the shoulders of a peasant, God would bring a new kingdom (*Isaiah 9:6-7*)
- From an oppressed nation, God would establish a new kingdom of justice (*Isaiah 9:7*)

Thousands of years ago, King Jesus came to bring His Kingdom into our story. There could not be a greater surprise ever given. The Scriptures tell us again and again that this Kingdom will bring peace, justice, and righteousness to all people who will follow. Don't let the stunning surprise become old in your heart or life this Christmas. Remember that the birth of King Jesus is "good tidings of great joy for all".

*What is one way you can surprise someone this week with an expression of Jesus' love and truth? Is it a gift to someone not expecting it? Is it a Bible to someone who doesn't know Jesus yet? Keep letting the Kingdom of God come through you so even more will know His good news!*



# DECEMBER SPECIAL SERVICES

## CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION SUNDAY

DECEMBER 17TH, 2023

8:30 | 9:45 | 11:15 AM

ONLINE SERVICE STARTS AT 10:00 AM | 11:15 DISPONIBLE EN ESPAÑOL

## CHRISTMAS EVE MORNING SERVICE

DECEMBER 24TH, 2023

10:00 AM

NO KIDS MIN | ONLINE STREAM AVAILABLE | DISPONIBLE EN ESPAÑOL

## CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLE LIGHT SERVICE

DECEMBER 24TH, 2023

4:30 & 6:00 PM

NO KIDS MIN | ONLINE STREAM AVAILABLE | DISPONIBLE EN ESPAÑOL

### **4:30 PM SERVICE DETAILS**

KIDS MIN AGES 0-2

### **6:00 PM SERVICE DETAILS**

NO KIDS MIN  
ONLINE STREAM AVAILABLE  
DISPONIBLE EN ESPAÑOL