

Christmas 2021

7 Day Devotional



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Versions of scripture quotations are noted.

DAY 1 - SILENCE IS BROKEN



READ: Malachi 4:5-6; Luke 1:5-25; 67-79

The Old Testament ends with a mysterious phrase in Malachi 4:5-6, written four centuries before the birth of Christ. *“See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.”* This ending may seem a bit confusing, or even disturbing. The verses reference Elijah, who is probably the most famous prophet in the Old Testament. He was relentless in calling God’s people to turn away from their sin and back to the one true God. Many in Jesus’ day believed that this Scripture implied that Elijah would come back from the dead. The Old Testament ends with God’s people left hanging, wondering, and waiting.

After the prophet Malachi penned these words, there were no prophets and no written revelations of God for 400 years. Generations went by without a fresh word from God. It is important to remember that God was silent from a human perspective, but that doesn’t mean that He stopped working on behalf of humankind. To the Jewish nation, it looked like God had abandoned them. But God was working behind the scenes, preparing the world, and setting the stage for His greatest work – the coming of His Son.

Finally, after 400 years of silence, when everything was ready, God spoke again through an angel. The word angel means messenger. When the angel Gabriel spoke, he picked up right where Malachi left off. In Luke 1:5-25, Zechariah is told that his wife Elizabeth would have a baby – John, and that this baby would be the one that Malachi had promised. A powerful, influential prophet who would be like Elijah. John, like Elijah, would call the people to repentance, back to God. As a priest, Zechariah was probably one of the few people who understood the Old Testament Scriptures well enough to make the connection between John and Elijah.

At some point, it all came into focus for Zechariah. There was a bigger picture here – more than just a miraculous birth to an elderly couple. Luke 1:67-79 records Zechariah’s Song. This is a song of faith, which references the coming Messiah. Only in verse 76 is the role of his own son, John the Baptist, addressed. The rest of the Song refers to the coming Redeemer, the coming King.



REFLECTION AND PRAYER

1. *In your journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s devotional and Bible reading.*
2. *Waiting is hard. When God seems silent, that doesn’t mean that He has stopped working. Ask Jesus to show you something behind the scenes that He is currently doing in your life. Praise Him.*
3. *Re-read Luke 1:68-79. Write a prayer to Jesus, praising Him and exalting Him based on what these verses tell us about Him.*

DAY 2 - MESSAGE TO MARY



READ: Luke 1:26-56

When Mary first encountered the angel, the Scripture says she was “greatly troubled” (vs. 29). We often lose sight of the reality behind this story. In their culture, an unmarried woman who found herself pregnant ran the risk of death by stoning. Mary was already engaged or betrothed. This news was going to deeply hurt the people she loved most. Her fiancé would have no reason to believe her story. Her parents would be emotionally crushed and scandalized. Yet Mary progressed from anxiety to acceptance. Mary was willing to take the step she was called to take, trusting God.

Mary’s response to the angel’s message was, “may it be to me as you have said” (vs. 38). This showed her willingness to carry a baby conceived of the Holy Spirit, to be part of God’s great plan. She would give birth to the Saviour of the world. Scripture does not record the conversations that she had with her family and with Joseph. We can only assume how those discussions went. We would all probably have the same reaction to a young pregnant girl telling stories about an angelic visitation. But God provided for Mary, through a supernatural connection with Elizabeth, both of whom were miraculously pregnant. Elizabeth knew the truth, responding by saying, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear” (vs. 42).

Mary’s song of praise to God is recorded in verses 46-55. This song has at least 12 allusions to the Old Testament, showing that Mary was a woman who studied and knew God’s Word. Scriptures were on her heart and came out through her song. This song mainly celebrates God’s goodness, faithfulness, and power. It shows the futility of trusting in self, of trusting in political power, or trusting in riches. Mary’s trust was in God. Mary rejoiced and glorified in God, though the child was not yet born. The blessedness of being the mother of the Son of God, would also be a sword to pierce her heart as it meant that someday she would see her son hanging on a cross.

God interrupted Mary’s life. Her journey was not what she would have originally expected. Being unmarried and pregnant would not be the life she had planned. Yet her heart was soft and open to obeying God. This teenage girl would give birth to the Chosen One. The Saviour of the world. The Messiah, the King of kings and Lord of lords.



REFLECTION AND PRAYER

1. *In your journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s devotional and Bible reading.*
2. *God’s plan interrupted Mary’s life. But it was His good and perfect plan, one that would greatly bless her yet pierce her heart. Ask Jesus to show you something regarding His plan for your life (either past, currently, or for the future). In prayer, thank Him for His plans, surrendering your own for His good and perfect plan.*
3. *Re-read Luke 1:45-55. Write a prayer to Jesus, praising Him and exalting Him based on what these verses tell us about Him.*

DAY 3 - MESSENGER TO JOSEPH



READ: Matt. 1:18-25, Isaiah 9:6-10

Matthew tells the story of the birth of Jesus through the eyes of Joseph. This was the man whom Mary was betrothed to marry. There were essentially three steps to marriage in the Jewish world of Jesus' time. First, engagement, which could happen when the bride and groom were very young, often arranged by their parents. Second, betrothal, which made the engagement official and binding. During the time of betrothal, the couple was considered as husband and wife. A betrothal could only be broken by divorce. Third, marriage, which usually happened a year after betrothal. This was the official wedding after which the marriage would be consummated.

It would have been a great trial for Joseph to find out Mary was pregnant during the betrothal period. Joseph, being a godly man, sought to divorce Mary quietly. But while he thought about these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream (vs. 20). The angel tells Joseph that Mary was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. There is no explanation as to how this happened, it is a miraculous mystery. The baby would be a boy, and his name was to be Jesus, because he will save his people from their sin (vs. 21). The virgin birth was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, the supernatural conception of Jesus was prophesied in Isaiah 7:14. The title Immanuel, God with us, signifies both His deity and His identification and nearness to man.

Joseph did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took Mary as his wife, not consummating the marriage until after the birth of Jesus (vs. 24-25). Joseph's obedience is notable. He understood the truth and the importance of the angelic messenger that came to him in the dream. Mary and Joseph did what God told them to do, naming their son Jesus. Which would become the greatest name, the name above all names.



REFLECTION AND PRAYER

1. *In your journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's devotional and Bible reading.*
2. *What lessons can we learn from Joseph's response to the word from the Lord through the angel?*
3. *Re-read Isaiah 9:6-7. Write a prayer to Jesus, praising Him and exalting Him based on what these verses tell us about Him.*

DAY 4 - JESUS IS BORN



READ: Luke 2:1-7

The story of Jesus birth began during the reign of Caesar Augustus. After years of war and destruction, he brought in a peaceful time. Political unity had been achieved in the Roman Empire and there was order. This set the stage for the registration and census, which wasn't for simple record-keeping or statistics. It was to efficiently and effectively tax everyone in the Roman Empire, including the Jews.

In response to the decree, all went to their hometown to be registered. No one could have realized that God was really in control of Caesar's decree as God had prophesied that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, the city of David (Micah 5:2). The young couple, Mary and Joseph, who wouldn't have been inclined to travel during her pregnancy, made their way to Bethlehem, as Joseph was a decedent of King David. It was the pagan authorities who were responsible for bringing these events to Bethlehem. Caesar unknowingly became the servant of God's purpose. God is in control of all events in human history. It was while they were in Bethlehem that the days were completed for the baby to be born (vs. 6).

Luke uses simple language to describe Christ's birth in contrast to how great an event this was. Under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke presented this most amazing event in an understated manner.

While in Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room available for them in the inn (vs. 7).

Jesus, who is God, is now born as man, telling of His amazing humility. Jesus steps from eternity into time in the humblest setting imaginable. He came in the weakest way possible, as a baby. The Jews were looking for a King to slay their foes, yet He came as an infant. He did not lay aside His deity; He laid aside His glory. There should have been more than just a few shepherds and angels to welcome Him—all of creation should have been there to worship Him. Royalty clothed in linen rags; majesty laid in a manger. Many years later that same body would be wrapped in linen and laid in a tomb. Swaddled at His birth, He was born to die. God manifest in the flesh.

*All praise to Thee, eternal Lord,
Clothed in a garb of flesh and blood;
Choosing a manger for a throne,
While worlds on worlds are Thine alone.
—Luther*



REFLECTION AND PRAYER

1. *In your journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's devotional and Bible reading.*
2. *What does this account say about the Sovereignty of God over earthly circumstances? How does that encourage you and give you hope in the circumstances you are facing?*
3. *Ponder the humility of Christ in taking on human flesh. Exalt the Lord, praising and thanking Him for the sacrifice He made for our salvation.*

DAY 5 - ANGELS AND SHEPHERDS



READ: Luke 2:8-20

Normally the birth of a prince would be announced to kings and other dignitaries, but this “princely” announcement was given to lowly shepherds. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were absolutely terrified (vs. 9). The “glory of the Lord” is a phrase often used in the Old Testament to refer to the manifestation of God’s presence among His people. Fear was the normal response whenever anyone in Scripture encountered an angel or saw the glory of God manifest. Those who experience the presence of the holy God are acutely aware of their sinfulness (Isa. 6:5). The shepherds were frightened by something awe-inspiring. The angel reassured them saying, “do not be afraid, I bring you Good News of great joy for all people!” (vs. 10). The message was not one of judgement but rather that God had sent a Saviour to redeem sinners. The angel was proclaiming the Gospel message, the Saviour has been born, the Messiah, the Lord (vs. 11).

Suddenly, the angel was joined by heaven’s choir who sang out an angelic anthem of praise. “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” (vs. 14). Gloria in Excelsis Deo. Let God be exalted above all other things, the highest degree of glory to God. The appearing of His Son Jesus Christ in the world, He by His life and death on the cross will glorify God. The whole purpose and plan of salvation is “glory to God”. The lowly manger was a holy of holies because Jesus was there, bringing peace on earth. The perfect peace between a holy God and sinful man, which Christ will purchase with His own blood is offered freely to all mankind. What hope!

The shepherds responded immediately, going straight to Bethlehem to see this thing that has come to pass (vs. 15). Note their sense of urgency, they were eager to see Jesus. And they found the baby, as He lay in a manger (vs. 16). Upon seeing, they went on their way, bearing witness to the events they had seen. And all who heard were amazed. The shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen (vs. 20).

Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart (vs. 19). Gabriel had told her that the baby would reign forever (Luke 1:31-33) and now shepherds reported that He was the Saviour, the Christ. This confirmed Gabriel’s promise of greatness for her Son. Mary’s reaction was to calmly take it all in, meditate over it in her heart, seeking to understand the deep meaning of it all.



REFLECTION AND PRAYER

1. *In your journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s devotional and Bible reading.*
2. *The shepherds responded with praise, worship, and witness. Mary responded with quiet reflection. How will you respond to the good news of Jesus, the Saviour, the Messiah?*
3. *In 4-5 sentences, write out how Jesus has impacted your life. How has your life changed? What does He mean to you? Ask Jesus to show to you someone you can share this with this week.*

DAY 6 - SIMEON & ANNA



READ: Luke 2:21-38

As devout, obedient parents, Mary and Joseph obeyed God's command in Leviticus 12 to have their son circumcised on the eighth day. The circumcision and purification ceremonies were necessary as a reminder that we are all born in sin. Jesus could have been excused because He was not born in sin. Yet we see that even as a baby He was identifying with sinners, as He also later did at His baptism and on the cross.

When Jesus was presented in the temple, Mary and Joseph meet Simeon. The Bible says that Simeon was a righteous and devout man, "waiting for the consolation of Israel" (vs. 25). The term consolation means comfort, in the specific sense of help or rescue. Simeon was waiting for Israel's deliverance through the Messiah. It was the Holy Spirit who led him to the temple that day (vs. 27). Upon seeing the Christ-child, he took him in his arms, praising God.

Simeon made prophetic statements, saying that this baby was not only the Messiah of Israel, but He would also save all who believe in Him, even the Gentiles (vs. 29-32). The promise of God had now been fulfilled to Simeon, which filled him with peace. Joseph and Mary marveled at the prophecy as they could see how God was already touching others through their infant son. Simeon spoke directly to Mary, prophesying that Jesus would "cause the rising and falling of many in Israel and be a sign that will be spoken against so the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too" (vs. 34-35). It was important for Mary to know that mothering the Messiah would not be all sweetness and light, it was both a great privilege and a burden.

The prophetess Anna, a godly woman who served God in the temple with total devotion, worshiping, fasting, and praying, also came up to them. Overcome with joy, thanks God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Israel. Another confirmation to Mary and Joseph that this was no ordinary child, their son was the long-awaited Redeemer. It is significant that Luke mentions an elderly woman to confirm the Messiah's identity and to spread the redemption message.



REFLECTION AND PRAYER

1. *In your journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's devotional and Bible reading.*
2. *Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel meaning comfort, rescue, help, and deliverance. Think of a time when God provided this for you. Write out what you were facing and how His presence brought you consolation. Then thank and praise Him.*
3. *Simeon and Anna were both waiting with expectant faith and hope. This waiting was enabled by the Holy Spirit. Is there something you are spiritually waiting for? For example, an unanswered prayer, a breakthrough, deliverance, character growth, etc. Write it down. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to empower you in the waiting, to fill you with expectant faith and hope.*

DAY 7 - WISEMEN



READ: Luke 2:1-12

After Jesus was born, travelers called wise men from the East arrived in Jerusalem, asking about the birth of the king of the Jews. Having seen an astrological phenomenon, they came to Jerusalem expecting to find answers, assuming that the leaders of the Jews would be aware and excited about the birth of their Messiah. Instead, they found that this wasn't the case at all. Herod was troubled at the news brought by the wise men (vs. 3) and inquired with the Jewish leaders regarding the birthplace of Christ. The religious leaders understood the prophetic biblical information correctly, that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Sadly, these experts had the right knowledge but were personally uninterested in meeting the Messiah for themselves.

Herod secretly met with the wise men to determine when the star appeared. Because Herod later commanded that all boys in the area age two and younger be killed, we can assume that the wise men first saw the star a year or so previously (on the night Jesus was born). Their journey from the East to Judea was not quick, and they may have left as soon as logistics allowed. After learning this timeframe, Herod sends the wisemen on their way, asking them to report to him so that he too may go and worship him (vs. 8). The irony is strong, Herod claimed a desire to worship Jesus when he really wanted to kill Him.

The wise men left Jerusalem with the star continuing to guide them to the place where the child was (vs. 9). On coming to the house of the Messiah, they bowed and worshiped Him, offering him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. It was common in the East that one would never appear before royalty or a person of importance without bringing gifts. They brought lavish gifts – gold speaks of royalty, frankincense speaks of divinity, myrrh speaks of death. These gifts were miraculous provision for this young family for the coming months. It helped them in the cost of their journey to Egypt and back, as they fled Herod. More importantly than their gifts, the wise men offered worship to Jesus. Dignitaries full of wisdom and wealth yet bowing to a young child. Being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed to their home country another way.

In this account we see three responses to Jesus. Herod displayed an open hatred and hostility toward Jesus. The chief priests and the scribes were indifferent towards Him. The wise men sought out Jesus and worshipped Him.



REFLECTION AND PRAYER

1. *In your journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's devotional and Bible reading.*
2. *What is the difference between knowing God and knowing about God? How do you see this played out by the characters in today's passage? How can we know Jesus personally?*
3. *The wise men brought Jesus worship. How can you worship Jesus today?*



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