

Advent 2020 Devotional:

# The Coming of the King

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Part 1 - The Long Wait

Part 2 - When He Came as a Child

Part 3 - When He Came to Life in Us

Part 4 - When He Comes Again





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Thank you for choosing to spend this Advent season with us! This year, you'll explore the true meaning of Advent and remember the great joy God has promised for those who wait for and hope in Him.



It's tempting to observe the Advent season by simply celebrating the modern traditions of Christmas — and why not? Christmas is wonderful, isn't it?

We delight in the nostalgia, the twinkly lights, the Christmas carols and finding the perfect gifts for loved ones. In fact, our culture loves Christmas so much that decorations and music creep into department stores earlier each year.

But the hope and expectation felt during the Christmas season is only a glimmer of what Advent represents: the waiting, longing for and looking forward to Christ, the greatest gift — God with us. It's clear, perhaps this year more than ever before, that we live in a broken world full of sin and sickness. We need our good God to intervene.

He did intervene that first Christmas. He began to make all things new.

He continues to do so today.

And He will ultimately perfect this world when Christ comes again.

People associate Advent with the coming of Christ to Earth on Christmas day. And that is an important aspect of Advent. But there are other “comings” that Advent reminds us of as well.

Throughout the Old Testament, Israel waited for the coming of their Messiah. You yourself experienced life change when Jesus came into your life. And we, the church, wait in hope for Christ to come again, ushering in His perfect kingdom, where sorrow will be a thing of the past.

We want to spend this season thinking about all of these “comings of the King” — waiting in joyful hope together for our Savior. We pray that, as you reflect on God's plan and goodness over the 26 days leading up to Christmas, hope and joy will grow in you as well.

Then, we'll end in celebration on Christmas Day, knowing a greater celebration is yet to come!

For tips on reading Scripture this Advent season, [check out our video on studying the Bible.](#)



# The Long Wait

**Redemption Promised and Looked Forward  
to in the Old Testament**



Day: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

# Nov. 29 | Day 1

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To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.  
 (Isaiah 9:6-7, New International Version)

hostile one. But in spite of humanity's fault for the damage, God always intended to save the people He made and restore His world.

This plan is seen in every part of the Old Testament, from the Law of Moses to the Psalms of David to the prophecies of Isaiah, all of which point people toward the Messiah, Jesus Christ. This week, you will study a few of these passages and learn about the spirit of Advent — of hope — that was present from the very beginning. Join us tomorrow for your first devotional.

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It's the start of the Advent season, and we're so glad you chose to spend part of it with us. At the heart of Advent is joyful hope. It's the waiting and

...in spite of humanity's fault for the damage, God always intended to save the people He made and restore His world.

expectation for Christ, God's greatest gift, to come and restore things to the goodness God intended from the start of creation.

After the first humans sinned and disobeyed their Creator God (which you can read about in [Genesis 3](#)), the relationship between God and humanity was broken. What was meant to be a loving and intimate relationship became a clashing,

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## Nov. 30 | Day 2

“She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). (Matthew 1:21-23, English Standard Version)

“O holy night. The stars are brightly shining.  
It is the night of our dear Savior’s birth.”

Every year, when I help my mom decorate the Christmas tree, this is the first carol playing through the speakers. As a child, I loved the melody and the story. Now, I also appreciate the profound words that point to the heart of Christmas.

“Long lay the world in sin and error pining,  
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.”

These words tell us of our need for a Savior.

When our creative God set the universe into motion, the Bible says, it was “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Humanity was the pinnacle of God’s creation, made in His image to reflect Him. We were made to flourish.

But Adam and Eve’s rebellion in Genesis 3 broke our relationship with God, and evil entered our world. Sin is now a part of our nature. I see the sin in my own actions and in our world. We died spiritually that day in the garden, and we need God’s intervention to bring us back to life.

“A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,  
For yonder breaks a new glorious morn.”

But in the same chapter, in Genesis 3:15, God’s promises of redemption and restoration begin. Even as Adam and Eve turned from Him, He responded in love and hope. And this restoration will be a gift to us, not anything we can earn.

“...the weary  
world rejoices,  
For yonder  
breaks a new  
glorious morn.”

Jesus, our promised hope from God, suffered and died so we might have a restored relationship with God and be made whole. Now we long for

the day when the hurting world will be healed by the Messiah who was born in a manger.

Let the weary world rejoice.

## Pray and Reflect

Where do you need God to intervene in your life right now? Where do you need the hope God offers? What hope can Immanuel, “God with us,” give you for the future? Pray and ask God to give you that hope today.

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## Dec. 1 | Day 3

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It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring — not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed — the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not. (Romans 4:13-17, New International Version)

"Father Abraham had many sons."

These are the lyrics of a popular children's song. The lyrics continue, "I am one of them, and so are you," then "let's all praise the Lord" (by shouting the names of our limbs). I grew familiar with the song at church, and it carries an important truth.

We praise the Lord because He followed through on His word to Abraham. In the Book of Genesis, God asked Abraham to go to a new land where He would bless him, make his lineage into a great nation and bless all the peoples of the earth through it (Genesis 12:1-3).

Abraham moved by faith, without knowing when God would execute His plan. He didn't see the promise fulfilled in his lifetime. But he chose to worship and follow God even when the circumstances didn't seem like blessings. God ultimately made good on His promise to bless all the peoples of the earth by sending Jesus, born from Abraham's family, to bear our sin and save all people who have faith in Him.

When Christ comes back, sin will be eradicated and all things will be made new.

And He made another promise: When Christ comes back, sin will be eradicated and all things will be made new.

Like Abraham, we are in a waiting time. We don't know when God will carry out His new promise. But in this season of Advent, we can persist knowing we will enter our glorious home with God because



Jesus was righteous for us. We will live forever with God in His family, as sons and daughters in the faith Abraham had.

That is our hope. It is a reason to praise the Lord.

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### Pray and Reflect

As you go to God in prayer, worship Him and thank Him through words or song for bringing about His promises. Ask Him to strengthen your faith as you wait for the restoration of this world.

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Rachel Streich serves as a journalist with Cru®. She grew up in Minnesota, graduated from the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire with a degree in journalism in 2014, and has since lived in various locations across the country and overseas. She loves sharing real-life stories.



## Dec. 2 | Day 4

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Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us — for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.” (Galatians 3:13, English Standard Version)

I knew it was wrong, but I picked up Sean’s guitar, his prized possession, anyway. He was away at class, and the temptation to gain some cred from my freshman friends by mocking him behind his back was irresistible. So I put on my best Sean-face and strummed out several hard notes.

Then a string snapped, and I froze.

My friends burst into laughter, but I stood there like an animal in a trap. Perhaps you know the feeling — you’ve said or done something you immediately regret, and inescapable guilt washes over you. You can’t hide or change the situation. You’re caught in the wrong, exposed.

According to the Bible, the Old Testament law was given to produce a similar effect. It lays out a standard of righteousness impossible to achieve. It shows how good God is and, by stark contrast, how short we fall.

When you know the right things to do and continually fail to do them, you end up feeling cornered and exposed, like me holding Sean’s guitar. The standards of the law become like an avalanche: each instruction a cascading snowball, falling one after another until they bury you beneath the staggering weight of the law’s curse.

Yet embedded within the law are hints that we, who continually fall short, don’t need to be the ones who bear that weight: the Passover, the sacrificial system, the many references to God’s mercy on those who turned to Him and away from wickedness. The Old Testament anticipates the truth stated so clearly in Galatians 3:13, that a curse-bearer is our hope and help.

When Christ comes back, sin will be eradicated and all things will be made new.

## Pray and Reflect

What words, deeds and mistakes create a crushing weight on you? Acknowledge these to God, and thank Him that He sent Jesus to become your curse-bearer.

If you've never asked Jesus to come into your life and bear the penalty for your sin, this may be a good time to consider doing so.

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Jason Weimer serves as the Director of Innovation and Partnerships for Cru Press. He served with Cru's campus ministry for 13 years before relocating to Cru's global headquarters in Orlando. He and his family enjoy beachgoing, homeschooling and cheering on Penn State together.



## Dec. 3 | Day 5

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We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away. Yet who of His generation protested? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people He was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death, though He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer, and though the LORD makes His life an offering for sin, He will see His offspring and prolong His days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in His hand. After He has suffered, He will see the light of life and be satisfied; by His knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 53:2-11, New International Version)

God cares as much for you as He did for Israel and Judah. He knows your struggles and the challenges you face. He offers you the same hope He offered them through your relationship with Jesus.

Because of the pandemic, this Advent season is unlike any before. Do you find yourself waiting and longing for “normal life” to return, wondering if it will ever come again?

In 740 B.C., the nations of Israel and Judah worried and wondered while living under the threat of invasion and captivity. The prophet Isaiah repeatedly called their kings to trust in God instead of alliances with neighboring nations. In dark, frightening times, God spoke words of hope through the prophet Isaiah about the coming Messiah,

Israel's Deliverer. He predicted where He would come from, what He would be like, what He would do and what would happen to Him. Each prediction was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

God cares as much for you as He did for Israel and Judah.

He knows your struggles and the challenges you face. He offers you the same hope He offered them through your relationship with Jesus. Has this pandemic season left you struggling? Look to Him and trust His plan.

As you prepare your heart for the celebration of Jesus' birth, remember and reflect on Isaiah's words about who Jesus is and what He did for you. Thank Him for loving you enough to endure that suffering for your sake. Thank Him that He is greater than whatever you're facing.

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### **Pray and Reflect**

“Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7, NIV). On paper, list every worry you can think of. Read and write out Philippians 4:6-7 across that list. Give all those worries to God. Thank Him for taking care of them. Demonstrate your “letting go” by tearing up the list and throwing it away.

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Since 1983, Mike Chapman has served Oklahoma college students, Hollywood entertainment professionals, Air Force Academy cadets and Colorado soldiers as a Cru® staff member. He's married with two grown children and currently loves writing at Cru's headquarters and doing prison ministry.



## Dec. 4 | Day 6

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How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever?  
 How long will you hide Your face from me?  
 How long must I take counsel in my soul and  
 have sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?  
 Consider and answer me, O LORD my God;  
 light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,  
 lest my enemy say, 'I have prevailed over him,'  
 lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

But I have trusted in Your steadfast love;  
 my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.  
 I will sing to the LORD, because He has dealt  
 bountifully with me. (Psalm 13:1-6, English  
 Standard Version)

I find myself often asking a similar question these days. How long?

How long, O Lord, will we continue to feel the effects of the coronavirus pandemic? How long will underserved communities experience such pain? How long will people within our country, and even the church, be in such disunity?

I have yet to hear any answers to these questions. But I find comfort in this psalm — not because it provides answers but because it redirects my concern. For the first two-thirds of this short psalm, David bemoans his own ignorance of God's timing. He cries out for deliverance from his enemies.

But then David responds in remembrance of who God is. He doesn't declare his trust in God's timing

Our world is broken.  
 We are broken.  
 Our enemy seeks to triumph over us.  
 But we know our God is for us.

but in His steadfast love. David relies not on physical safety but on God's salvation, whatever that looks like.

That is where we must find our comfort in

these difficult times. Our world is broken. We are broken. Our enemy seeks to triumph over us. But we know our God is for us. We know Jesus is coming back. And until He does, we must look to Him.

Remember, it is a radical act to worship Jesus and look forward to His return, even as we continue to see disheartening news stories. Even when the peppy Christmas carols on the radio clash with the harsh world around us, we can trust that Jesus is good.

## Pray and Reflect

Take time to look forward today. Anticipate the end of illness, pain and injustice. Hold on to the tension you feel between eagerly awaiting Christ's return and celebrating that He has already come to earth to die for our sins.

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Elliott Dodge lives in Houston with his wife and their two children, Indy and Mo. He is passionate about seeing God's will done on Earth as it is in Heaven, and he usually starts listening to Christmas music on Nov. 1.



# Faith in Action

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Dec. 5 | Day 7

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On Saturdays during Advent, you are invited to actively apply something you learned in the previous week — to put your faith into action.

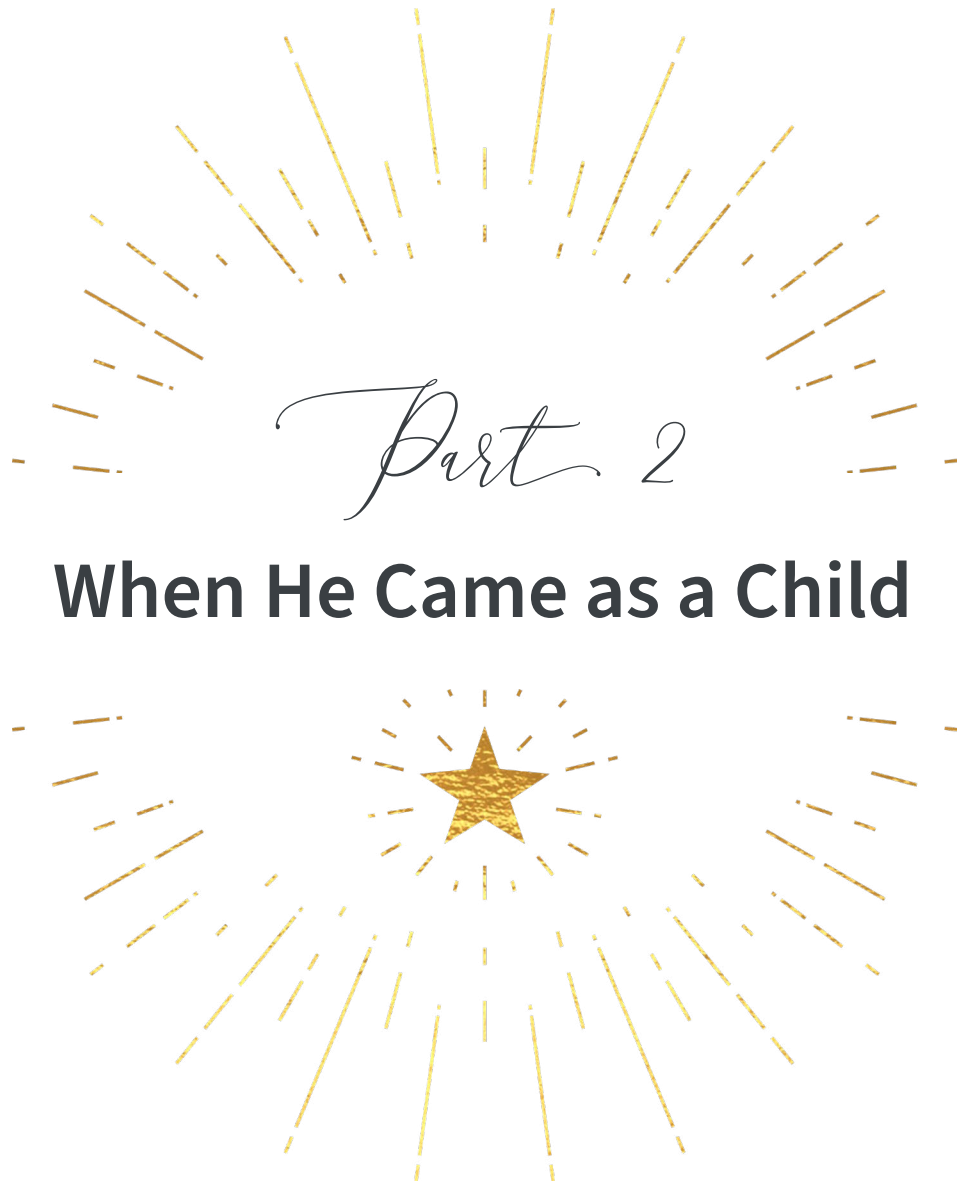
Last week, you studied the hope of God’s salvation in the Old Testament. There is a great deal of darkness, sin and struggle recorded in the Old Testament. Still, Scripture in both testaments always leads to the hope of God as our Savior and the joy to come.

Yesterday, you read about the psalms of David: how he was honest in his prayers (or conversations with God) and how God led David back to hope through those prayers.

## Today:

- Have an honest conversation with God about your struggles, sin and heartache during this season. Where are you struggling to follow Him faithfully? Where are you wrestling with sin? Is there anything you haven’t been trusting Him to make well? Have you been praying for something regularly and not seeing any result?
- Write out your struggles in the form of a psalm, or in the way that feels most comfortable to you. Lay them out before God so He can take control.
- Read [Hebrews 10:32-39](#) and praise God that He is faithful to forgive, to make all things right and to give you a hope beyond your circumstances.
- If you need to talk to someone about your struggles, consider reaching out to someone in your life who is compassionate and wise, or connect with someone through Cru’s [Spiritual Growth and Guidance Center](#).





Day: 8 9 10 11 12 13 14

## Dec. 6 | Day 8

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In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the

people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

While Christmas Day comes at the end of the Advent season, the birth of Jesus was just the beginning of His saving work.

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” (Luke 2:1-14, English Standard Version)

Christmas Day, the culmination of the Advent season, celebrates God in Jesus Christ coming to earth, born as a child in humble circumstances. He grew to lead a sinless life, touch the lives of many, and die for the salvation of the world. The story of that first day, His birthday, is known as the Nativity.

While Christmas Day comes at the end of the Advent season, the birth of Jesus was just the beginning of His saving work. God in Christ would fulfill His promises to restore creation and His relationship with those whom He chose to be His. That is why you will study the Nativity, Christ’s “first coming,” this second week of Advent.

## Dec. 7 | Day 9

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The angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord.”  
(Luke 1:13-15, English Standard Version)

The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. 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, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”  
(Luke 1:30-33, ESV)

When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord

Jesus doesn't need you, but He graciously invites you into His redemptive plan.

should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” (Luke 1:41-45, ESV)

Have you ever asked a question of a Magic 8 Ball?

If you're unfamiliar, a Magic 8 Ball is a toy you can ask a question and shake. Then, if you look through the viewfinder, you'll see a random response. It's sometimes tempting to see God as like a Magic 8 Ball: You come to him looking to answer your questions and expect a simple yes, no or “not now.”

But God's answers to Mary and Elizabeth's prayers were not predictable, and they were not boring. Mary and Elizabeth were stunned by God's response to their prayers to Him. Elizabeth was barren — then she was pregnant! Similarly, God blessed Mary with her son while she was still a virgin.

God was gracious to Mary and Elizabeth and, out of His sovereignty, they gave birth to John the Baptist and Jesus. These two lives were pure grace, undeserved gifts from God.

Jesus didn't have to enter the world as a vulnerable baby. He didn't have to allow anyone to play a vital role in His story, but He did. Jesus doesn't need you, but He graciously invites you into His redemptive plan.

This chapter ends with Mary praising God: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name" (Luke 1:46-49, ESV).

We too can rejoice. We don't always know how God will answer our prayers, but we can trust they are always for our good and His glory.

### Pray and Reflect

Jesus humbled himself by coming to earth as a child so He could ultimately grow up and save the world. What is one practical way you can humble yourself and serve another person this week? Perhaps God can use you to surprise them with goodness.

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Sarah Winebrenner is on staff with Cru® along with her husband, Andrew. They reside in Kentucky with their two children, Finley and Shepherd. Sarah enjoys reading, writing, deep conversations, baking and nail polish.



## Dec. 8 | Day 10

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“This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through His prophet:

“Look! The virgin will conceive a child!  
 She will give birth to a son,  
 and they will call Him Immanuel,  
 which means ‘God is with us.’”

When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as

his wife. But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named Him Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-21, 24-25, New Living Translation)

Good people can make bad decisions when they act with incomplete information. Joseph had every reason to doubt Mary’s faithfulness and cast her aside. Mary could have survived as a single mother, parenting a sinless child, perhaps living away from the gossiping tongues of Nazareth with her loving

“...you are to name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

cousin Elizabeth. Jesus and John the Baptist could have been playmates.

However, God loved Joseph, Mary and Jesus, and He wanted this family whole.

So He corrected Joseph’s faulty assumptions and gave him the information, encouragement and instruction he needed to restore his family. God’s intervention kept that family intact.

Although God seldom uses dreams to speak to His people, through His words in the Bible we have the information, encouragement and instruction we need to repair any nightmare or fractured relationship caused by our faulty assumptions.

In 1 Corinthians 13:7, Paul writes that love:

- Puts up with anything.
- Trusts God always.
- Always looks for the best.
- Never looks back.
- Keeps going to the end.

Nobody dreams of having a bad relationship with their family or friends, but sometimes we misperceive, misinterpret or overreact to a situation. Loving by faith means taking the time to listen, understand and have compassion. If you feel disconnected and distant from a loved one, take the initiative to hear their story without condemnation. You will be taking the first step toward fulfilling your dreams of reconciliation.

## Pray and Reflect

Is there someone you need to love by faith this Christmas? “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18, New International Version).

David Lloyd works in Austin, Texas, with Global Church Movements to give every man, woman and child in the metro area ongoing opportunities to see and hear of Jesus’ love for them through a united movement of mobilized churches. Previously, David and his wife, Elaine, led teams pioneering Cru® ministries in Moscow under the USSR and in Latvia, and they coordinated Agape Europe’s Ministry to Leaders and Influencers. In his spare time, David has begun writing his first book, “Living on Mission: Stories of Radical Faith, Hope, and Love.”



## Dec. 9 | Day 11

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When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. (Luke 2:15-20, English Standard Version)

You wait all the time. You wait in line at stores, you wait for the commercial to end, and you wait for traffic lights to turn green. This year, you’ve waited for the pandemic to wane so you can put away your mask, stand closer than six feet and return to public activities you once enjoyed. And waiting is tough.

At the beginning of time, God promised to send a Savior. For thousands of years, the Jewish people waited expectantly for their ruling king to come to earth and sit on His throne.

Instead, God sent Jesus as an infant, born in a humble manger. He announced Christ’s arrival by sending angels to lowly shepherds working the night shift in a field near Bethlehem. This was not what God’s people were expecting. But it was everything they’d been waiting for.

“Good news!” an angel said. “Jesus has been born. He’s Christ the Lord, who will save the people from their sins. You can find Him in Bethlehem, lying in a manger.”

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, among men with whom He is pleased!”

Then the choir arrived: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, among men with whom He is pleased!” Then the angels disappeared into the darkness.

Cinching up their robes, the shepherds ran toward Bethlehem and found Jesus just as the angels said they would. The shepherds, now breathless, told Mary and Joseph everything that had happened. And they marveled at the details.

Mary treasured their words in her heart. Perhaps she was thinking, “Our waiting has come to an end. He’s here.”

## Pray and Reflect

This Christmas season, find simple ways you can marvel at the gifts of grace God has given on ordinary days. Ask God to give you moments you can treasure in your heart.



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Anne Marie Winz, a Cru® staff member serving with the International School Project, enjoys telling ministry stories. When she's not traveling, she enjoys birding. She's happily married to Mark and has two talented children.





## Dec. 10 | Day 12

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When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house and saw the child with His mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Matthew 2:10-11, New Living Translation)

The jewel-toned beauty of multi-colored Christmas lights sometimes reminds me of sweet chocolate M&Ms. One Christmas Eve, I sat near my mother's tree munching a handful of the colorful candies with excitement. The wait would soon be over, and I could finally open my presents!

Being 7 years old, I couldn't define "anticipation," let alone write the word in a sentence. But I knew that feeling of excitement, wonder and hope. What was soon to come was a goodness that wrapped my heart in joy.

The practice of waiting has its benefits. Your perspective becomes focused. You long for what has not yet come. You believe, in faith, for what will arrive at the perfect moment.

Through the gift of His Son, Jesus, God fulfills the eternal anticipation of your heart's desire, which

only He can do. The wise men in Matthew 2 who sought the Savior of the world felt this anticipation as they searched for Jesus. And when they found Him, they responded in sincere worship because this is what happens when your hope in God is fulfilled — He satisfies you with unspeakable joy.

### Pray and Reflect

What are you anticipating this Christmas season? Have some relationships and distractions left you feeling unfulfilled? Pray and ask God to pour His love and peace upon you. Invite the Lord to wrap your heart in a hope in Him that will never disappoint.

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Melody Copenny serves as an editor and journalist with Cru. She's an Atlanta, Georgia, native and University of Georgia graduate with a bachelor's degree in magazine journalism. She enjoys exploring the intersection of creativity, theology and popular culture in her writing projects.

## Dec. 11 | Day 13

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Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for Him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took Him in his arms and praised God, saying:

“Sovereign Lord, as You have promised, You may now dismiss Your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel”. (Luke 2:25-32, New International Version)

There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very

moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:36-38, New International Version)

“But they were made for Christmas!” I protested as I peered down at my rag-tag band of misfit ornaments. A beakless dove dressed in gaudy, golden glitter. A slightly misshapen sheep with only one eye intact. A happy child sprawled out on her belly with no sled beneath her. It was our first Christmas together after getting married, and my husband just didn't see the glory of my misfits. I

Whatever pieces you're missing, wherever your story is warped and misshapen, Jesus is the peace, comfort and Savior who came to make you whole.

smiled knowingly at him and hung them high on the tree.

As part of the Jewish remnant living in Jerusalem under Roman rule, Simeon and Anna

were undoubtedly a little worn out and banged up too. They were both elderly. And it cannot have been easy to worship Yahweh faithfully year after year immersed in Roman culture with its many gods.

Being devout, they were surely well-versed in Old Testament history — how their people’s idolatry led to exile and captivity. Israel had been waiting for centuries for the promised one who would sit on David’s throne forever. Somehow, these weathered yet faithful saints held onto hope and believed the Messiah was coming.

When Simeon and Anna beheld the helpless infant Jesus that day in the temple, it could not have been the salvation they were expecting. Only the Holy Spirit could give them eyes of faith to see this humble babe as Israel’s long-awaited consolation.

It was a misfit salvation for a misfit people. Even so, He was a perfect Savior — the long-awaited comfort these weary saints were waiting for.

Faithful misfit, you were made for Christmas too. Whatever pieces you’re missing, wherever your story is warped and misshapen, Jesus is the peace, comfort and Savior who came to make you whole.

## Pray and Reflect

In what areas of your life have you been waiting for the Lord to move? How does knowing that Jesus is Immanuel, “God with us,” comfort you as you strive to remain faithful?

Fay Augenstein hails from Valparaiso, Indiana (home of Orville Redenbacher) and is an alumni of Ball State University (Chirp, Chirp). She currently lives in Orlando, Florida, with her husband Andrew and their two sons Grant (7) and Jacob (5). Fay enjoys studying God’s Word, discipling women and children, cooking, crocheting and pretending to be an amateur makeup artist.



# Faith in Action

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Dec. 12 | Day 14

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On Saturdays during Advent, you are invited to actively apply something you learned in the previous week — to put your faith into action.

Last week, you studied the Nativity — Jesus Christ’s first coming into the world as a child, born into humble circumstances. You know this beautiful story: There was no room at the inn, so Jesus was born in a stable to His loving earthly parents, Mary and Joseph. The angels sang, the wise men came to worship Him, and faithful men and women rejoiced because they knew He was God’s promised Savior.

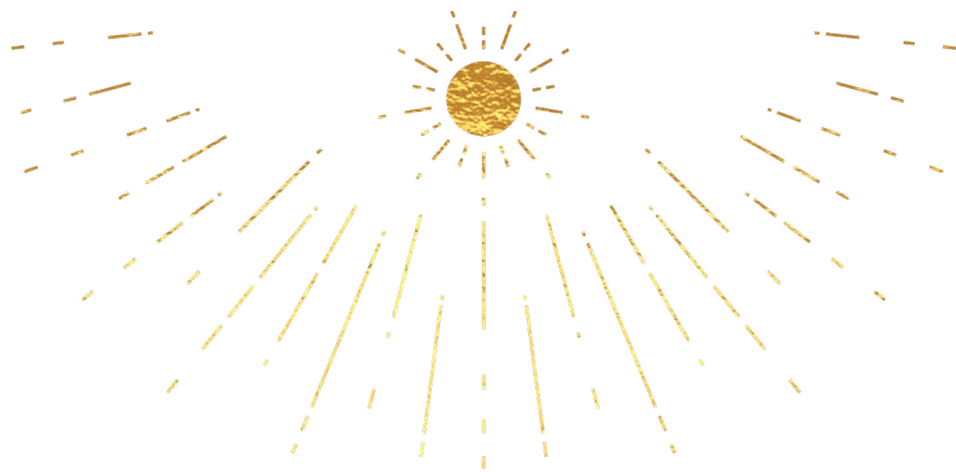
Although this story should be at the center of the Christmas season, we often find ourselves swept up in the flurry of Christmas parties, decorations, shopping and the fun or stressful details. This week, refocus on Christ.

## Today:

- Pray for a loved one who is on your heart and with whom you can talk about the meaning of Advent and Christmas. Pray that God would bless your conversation and use you in their life.
- Have that conversation with a loved one about Christmas and Jesus’ birth. Ask why they think it is celebrated extravagantly and globally, who they believe Jesus is, and whether that has any effect on their life or actions during this season. Listen to learn more about their heart.
- If you’re given the opportunity, share what you believe about Jesus, Advent and Christmas. As 1 Peter 3:15 says, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”
- If you need help learning how to share about the basics of the Christian faith, consider downloading the [God Tools app](#), which has short, clear presentations like the Four Spiritual Laws and Knowing God Personally.



## **When He Came to Life in Us**



Day: 15 16 17 18 19 20 21

## Dec. 13 | Day 15

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Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.

This is how we know that we live in Him and He in us: He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. (1 John 4:7-16, New International Version)

Traditionally, when you think about Christmas, you think about Jesus Christ coming as an infant into the world — and you should. It was a turning point in history.

But if you have a relationship with Jesus Christ, you know there is another point in time to treasure and remember as you wait on the Lord: the day He came into your life.

This day looks different for different people. Some were children when they met Jesus and never departed from Him; some were at concerts, some were in prison and some had been going to church for decades.

Some people remember the exact moment they asked Christ to be their Lord. Some can't call up the memory; they just knew, at some point, that they were His. A friend of mine once said, "Sometimes salvation is like a light switch and sometimes it's like a sunrise, but either way it's beautiful."

Whatever your story looks like, it is beautiful because of its Author. This week, you will study the New Testament to learn about the early disciples' first encounters with Christ and how the Lord works as He takes up residence in your life.

## Dec. 14 | Day 16

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The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water.”

“Sir,” the woman said, “You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can You get this living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”

Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”  
(John 4:9-13, New International Version)

I clicked through to purchase, excited about not waiting until Christmas to enjoy a gift for myself. In the press to complete the long task list that is “the season,” I was looking for one thing that was just right and just for me.

Sometimes I hope the special thing I find online will make me feel whole again, but then I remember the story of the woman at the well. The story of a woman who encountered Jesus going about her

As you encounter Jesus this holiday season in the press of increased busyness, do you hear His invitation to come?

daily life reminds me that Jesus is what my soul truly craves.

The woman met Jesus during her daily task, the one that always needed doing and that

exposed her to public ridicule: drawing water. She needed that water to live another day of a life that didn’t turn out how she’d expected.

Jesus met her there in the heat and offered to quench her thirst — her real thirst; that part of her that was never satisfied before.

She threw all her questions at Jesus. Did she expect Him to run off? Jesus kept the conversation going, coming ever deeper, ever closer to the answer:

I am the One you're looking for. I am the One who quenches your soul's thirst. I can free you from your shame. I am the One you were taught would explain everything. I am the Messiah.

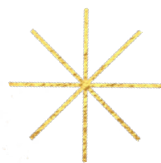
She believed Him, and she ran to tell everyone she'd been avoiding that she'd met the Life-Giver Himself.

As you encounter Jesus this holiday season in the press of increased busyness, do you hear His invitation to come? That is Jesus' invitation to you. To come and receive life from Him instead of living life like you're buying your own Christmas presents — patching something together to avoid disappointment.

### Pray and Reflect

Read through John 4:1-30. What would it look like to spend time with Jesus, the giver of living water, today? How can He meet the deepest needs of your soul?

Alison Wilson currently ministers to college students at Texas A&M University, but she spent the first 13 years of her adult life as an overseas missionary with Cru®. Her three children and her husband all depend on her to keep the fridge stocked — the modern version of going to the well. When she gets the bug to write, she blogs at [eternalwaitofglory.com](http://eternalwaitofglory.com).





## Dec. 15 | Day 17

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Before long, the world will not see Me anymore, but you will see Me. Because I live, you also will live. ... All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:19, 25-27, New International Version)

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1-4, New International Version)

Do you ever feel disconnected from the “joy” of the Christmas season? After all, you can’t just hit pause on pain and suffering in your life until Christmas is over. When life is a mess, the celebration can feel forced — even manufactured. What comfort and joy does God offer when life hurts?

Sometimes, I imagine what it must have felt like to be the disciples at the last supper. Can you picture it? Jesus, their best friend and Savior,

Advent and the Christmas season aren’t simply about celebrating what God did thousands of years ago but what He is doing for all who trust in His Son right now.

telling them He’s going to leave? They felt afraid, confused, helpless, vulnerable and exposed. What would happen to them once Jesus left? Was He abandoning them?

Jesus answered their very real fears by promising they would still see Him, by promising to send the Holy Spirit, and by giving them His peace.

This is the good news: God wants to be with you in your pain, fear and mess. Advent and the Christmas season aren’t simply about celebrating what God did thousands of years ago but what He is doing for all who trust in His Son right now. Jesus is Immanuel, God-With-You, right here and now.

We find comfort and joy when life hurts because God gives us His presence today through the Holy Spirit. If Jesus is the Lord of your life, this is true for you always.

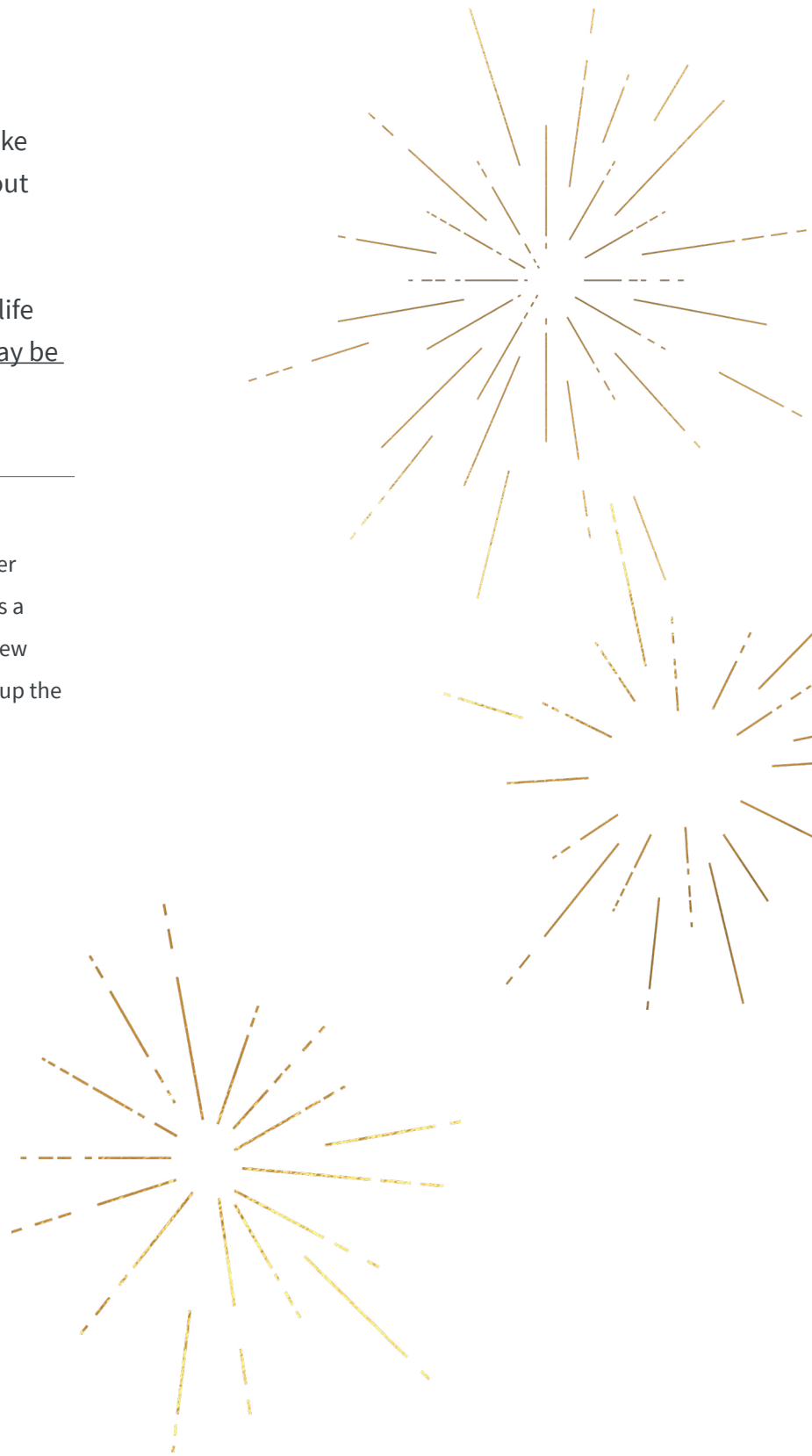
## Pray and Reflect

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what it looks like to “walk hand-in-hand” with Him, and check out [“How to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit.”](#)

If you’ve never asked Jesus to come into your life and be with you in every circumstance, [this may be a good time to consider doing so.](#)

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Nick Audas is passionate about helping others encounter Jesus deeply. He does this frequently through his role as a missionary with Cru®, serving for the last five years in New York City. He and his wonderful family are now soaking up the sun as they serve in Orlando, Florida.



## Dec. 16 | Day 18

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The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, “Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?” So the people came streaming from the village to see Him. ...

Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, “He told me everything I ever did!” When they came out to see Him, they begged him to stay in their village. So He stayed for two days, long enough for many more to hear His message and believe. Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard Him ourselves. Now we know that He is indeed the Savior of the world.” (John 4:28-30, 39-42, New Living Translation)

“No, that’s fine.”

“Seriously, you really need to try this,” I told her. She reluctantly took my fork.

Her eyes widened as she tasted the bite. “Oh wow, that’s delicious. Now I wish I had your plate.”

You’ve had this experience, or one like it. You order a drink, a dessert or a meal and you just can’t

stop talking about it. You post pictures on social media. You tell your friends about this amazing restaurant.

You’re a food evangelist.

In John 4, we meet a woman just like that. She shows up at a well in the heat of the day longing to

have her thirst quenched, but she meets a man who tells her strange things.

He offers her a drink that will make her never thirst again. He tells her all about her past, even though she’s never met Him. She’s encountered Jesus and believes in what He’s saying. She believes He’s the one who’s come to save God’s people.

“Oh my goodness, you have to taste this. It’s amazing,” I cut off a generous portion of my perfectly-seasoned steak to share with my wife.

*It’s impossible to hold back a true experience with Jesus. Just like the Samaritan woman had her village, there are people around you who need to taste the water that will make them never thirst again.*

She’s just taken a drink of the water He offered, and she immediately leaves her jar and runs back to the village to share about it.

It’s impossible to hold back a true experience with Jesus. Just like the Samaritan woman had her village, there are people around you who need to taste the water that will make them never thirst again.

Offer a drink. Share Jesus with them.

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### Pray and Reflect

Who are the “thirsty” people around you — people who don’t have a personal relationship with Jesus. Make a list. Pray for opportunities and the boldness to share a taste of the water you’ve found.

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Ben McGuire serves as an international sending coordinator and a theological development coordinator with Cru. He lives outside of Raleigh, North Carolina, with his wife Jill and their three children, Reece, Wyatt, and Claire. You can follow his blog at [Breadcrumbs](#).



## Dec. 17 | Day 19

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Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ... Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (Colossians 3:5-8, 12-14, English Standard Version)

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. (Galatians 5:16-17, English Standard Version)

December rolled around, and with it came brisk air, bright lights and eager anticipation. It was almost Christmas in Buffalo, and the only thing missing at my workplace was old St. Nick.

For the holiday party, my coworkers wanted a Santa Claus. And they knew just the man for the role: Me.

I reluctantly agreed.

It's one thing to be Santa in a mall where kids see you as a hero. But on a college campus? Yikes!

I was so embarrassed and annoyed with my coworkers, but when it came time to put on the costume, none of that mattered anymore. I was no longer Thomas Rodrigues. I was Santa. And Santa isn't bitter. Santa doesn't think he's too cool to be Santa. Santa is jolly. Santa is generous. Santa is always up for the task.

For me to thrive, I had to forget I was Thomas and embrace the sweaty jacket and itchy beard as my own. That day, I became Santa Claus.

...Paul instructs us to put off the old way of living and put on the new. Why? Because that's no longer who we are.

The Christian life is similar. In Colossians 3, Paul instructs us to put off the old way of living and put on the new. Why? Because that's no longer who we are. We're no longer wearing our old clothes of sin and brokenness. We're "God's chosen ones" and "holy and beloved by God."

God's chosen ones don't need to be controlled by evil desire. Beloved people don't need to hold grudges. As Christians, we're no longer "earthly," but chosen, holy and loved.

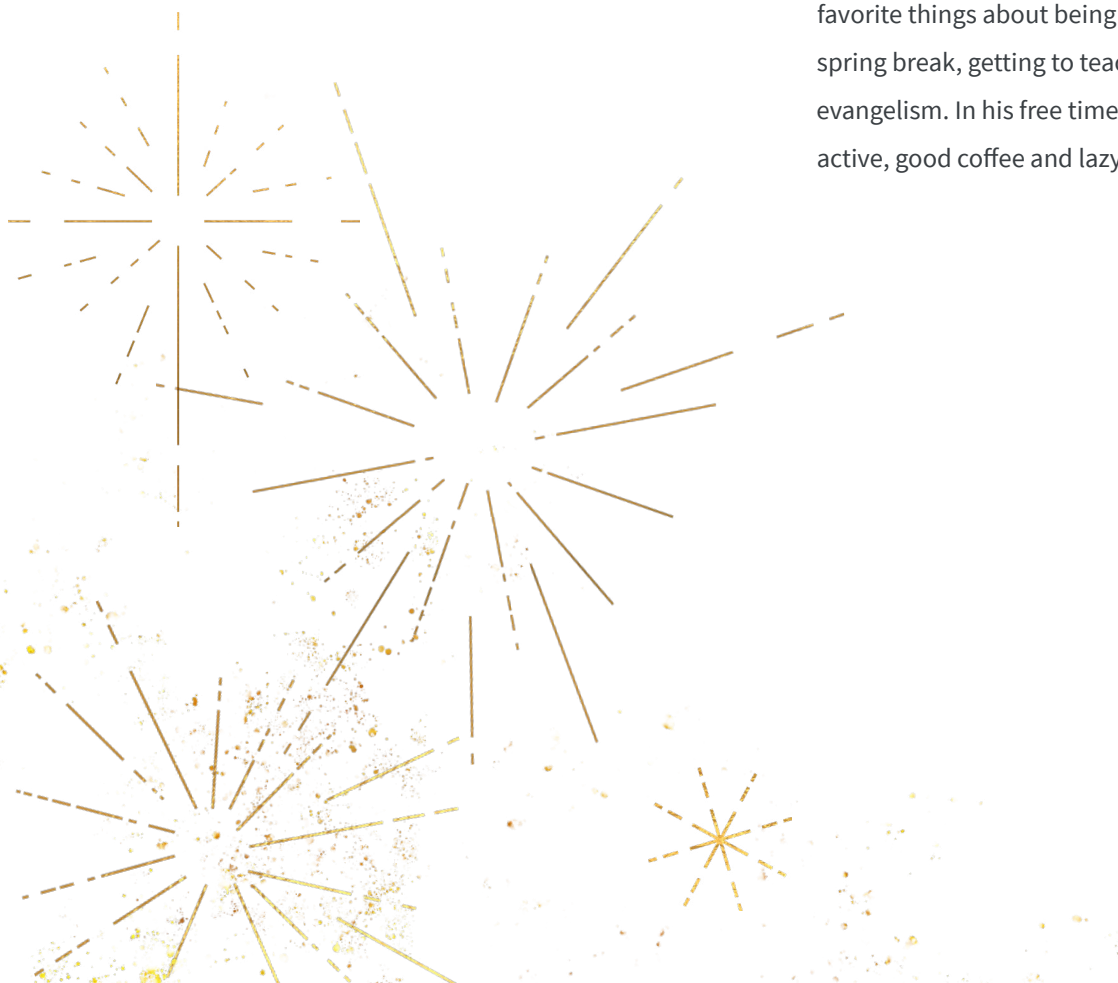
Go ahead — put that on!

### Pray and Reflect

God tells us in His Word that if you are a follower of Jesus, you have been chosen by God Himself. He tells us that you are now holy, and you are His beloved.

Do you ever find yourself resistant to those truths? What part of being chosen, holy and loved is hard for you to put on or embrace? Ask God to help you believe what He says about you, and ask Him to help you walk in it today.

Thomas Rodrigues serves with the Cru® campus ministry in Buffalo but was born and raised in Montreal. Some of his favorite things about being on staff include summer missions, spring break, getting to teach and doing the hard work of evangelism. In his free time, he loves watching sports, staying active, good coffee and lazy Saturday mornings!



## Dec. 18 | Day 20

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There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He distributes them to each one, just as He determines. (1 Corinthians 12:4-11, New International Version)

Do you read this passage and wonder if you really have any special gifts that God has entrusted you with to show His love and care?

I sometimes feel that way. When I do, I look at Jesus. When He came as a baby, He put on a human body like yours and mine.

This year, maybe you've become keenly aware of your human need for physical connection and the presence of others. For me, the internet

was a lifeline to stay connected. But, at times, it also was a frustrating reminder of what was missing. It can steal our sense of the gifts God's given us "in real life."

Don't get me wrong, I love being able to find a song or podcast

God gave you a body and calls you to be physically present for the circle of people He placed in your life. You can trust that He gave you all you need to show His endless love to those people right where you are.

whenever I like. But I have to be careful because the internet also leaves me thinking I have nothing to contribute to this wealth of ideas. Compared to what's out there, I can feel mediocre.

What I forget is that God doesn't call us to be disembodied voices online. God gave you a body and calls you to be physically present for the circle of people He placed in your life. You can trust that

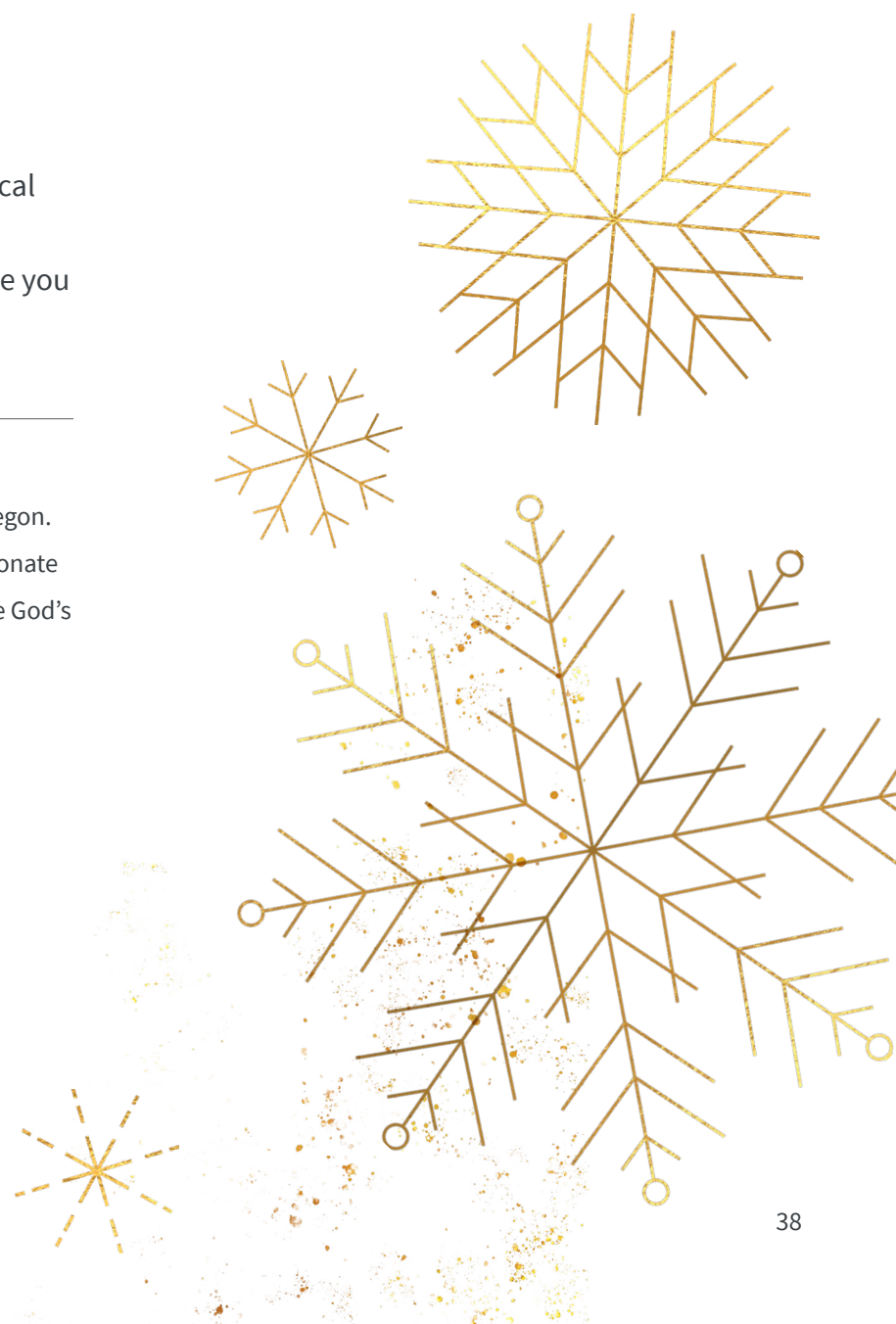
He gave you all you need to show His endless love to those people right where you are.

Your body and abilities may limit you in some ways, but your physical presence is so wonderful that Jesus became human to be face to face with you. And that presence is only one gift you have to give to the world.

### Pray and Reflect

Who in your life could use the gift of your physical presence? Who can you listen to, sit with and remind they are loved? Pray that God would use you just as you are this week.

Joanna Wilson works as a writer for Cru® in Portland, Oregon. She enjoys hot tea, rainy days and fat books. She's passionate about finding good stories about how people experience God's love and sharing them with others.





# Faith in Action

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Dec. 19 | Day 21

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On Saturdays during Advent, you are invited to actively apply something you learned in the previous week — to put your faith into action.

Last week, you studied passages in the New Testament to learn how Christ changes the lives of believers when they enter a personal relationship with Him, including how they are a witness of His love to the world.

You can be a part of telling the world about a better kingdom to come, one where there is no more sorrow, sickness or death.

In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus says, “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (New International Version).

We “let our light shine” when we tell people about the love and forgiveness of Christ, but we also do so when we demonstrate sacrificial love, the way Christ loved us.

## This week:

- Research opportunities to serve people around you. Often, with the holiday season comes awareness of organizations in need. These could be homeless shelters, food pantries or underserved schools or communities. Local churches often have lists of such organizations.
- In spite of the busyness of the season, reach out to one of these organizations and make a plan to volunteer with them on a day they have need. Consider bringing your family or friends along — it may bless you all more than you’d think.
- If you are not comfortable going out to serve, consider giving financially to a worthy cause, such as providing meals to communities in need. Right now, 132 million people don’t know where their next meal is coming from, and because of the pandemic, that number could double by the end of the year. You can help even from your own home. Give as the Lord leads.
- Reflect on your experience and remember that reaching out in love is exactly what the Lord did for your sake on Christmas Day. It’s this sort of action that changes lives.



# When He Comes Again



Day: 22 23 24 25 26 27

## Dec. 20 | Day 22

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Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52, New International Version)

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, NIV)

This month, we've remembered Christ's first coming as an infant on Christmas Day and His coming into our lives personally. Both points in time have changed the course of history.

As a follower of Christ, you have an even greater hope to look to, long for and anticipate. Jesus

Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and rose again, is coming back someday to make all things new.

Christ, who died for our sins and rose again, is coming back someday to make all things new.

The Bible calls Christians "pilgrims" or "sojourners" in this world, meaning it is not their permanent home. While you are here, you are to wage war against sin and be the light of Christ to a broken world. But in the end there will be only joy and peace in the presence of the true King.

Join us during this last week of Advent to read about the hope that is promised when Jesus returns and to celebrate Christmas with that hope in mind.

## Dec. 21 | Day 23

“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

(Romans 8:18, English Standard Version)

“Behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.” (Revelation 22:7, ESV)

People seem to be avoiding the news today more than ever before. There is a constant deluge of discouragement out there. Some of it can inspire change, but some can simply steal life from you.

It’s easy to see that there is great agony in our world. Trials, difficulties and suffering are everywhere and, unfortunately, unavoidable. When suffering rears its ugly head, one can wonder why God permits it and if it will ever stop.

But God shows us in His Word that through Him, we can see past any current trial. We can trust that He knows exactly what He’s doing. You can believe with certainty that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18). He is good.

Why? Because He willingly, lovingly laid down His life for you.

The Son of God reigns over every aspect of the entire universe. Because He laid down His life, you can be sure that the control He has over everything is perfectly right and divinely scripted for His glory and your good. Christ is good, all-knowing and the

Christ is good, all-knowing and the coming King. You can know He understands your sufferings and will end them someday.

coming King. You can know He understands your sufferings and will end them someday.

to life again. God’s power is verified by the empty tomb. And because He holds the keys to life and death, you can trust He knows exactly what He’s doing, and He will make everything right.

All hopelessness died on the third day when God the Son killed death itself and rose

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20).

## Pray and Reflect

Make a list of the sufferings you are currently going through. Now, through the lens of Scripture, list the reasons Jesus understands each and every one of your sufferings. Take some time to pray and thank God that He understands the suffering you're going through. He will return one day to end all suffering forever.

Shelby Abbott is an author, campus minister and conference speaker on staff with FamilyLife®, a ministry of Cru®. His passion for university students has led him to speak at college campuses all over the United States and author the books "Pressure Points: A Guide to Navigating Student Stress" and "DoubtLess: Because Faith Is Hard." He and his wife, Rachael, have two daughters and live in Downingtown, Pennsylvania.



## Dec. 22 | Day 24

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For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God’s curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God’s children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. (Romans 8:19-22, New Living Translation)

pandemics, sex trafficking, drug overdoses, racism, unemployment, abuse, hunger — the troubles are too numerous to list. You may feel you barely have time to take a breath and recuperate before another “labor pain” hits.

Christmas is not only a celebration of the day Jesus was born but an acknowledgment by faith that He is coming again and will finally lift the curse of sin and death. Like a woman who forgets the pain of

childbirth as she joyfully holds her newborn baby, someday our troubles will be over and forgotten as we behold Christ forever. This is a promise for everyone who puts their life in Jesus’ hands.

When I went into labor with my first child, the first few hours of contractions were fairly mild. “This isn’t so bad,” I thought. “Why do women make such a big deal about this?”

Christmas is not only a celebration of the day Jesus was born but an acknowledgment by faith that He is coming again and will finally lift the curse of sin and death.

Forty-eight hours later, exhausted and groaning in pain, still with no baby, I was feeling a lot less smug. My contractions had become more intense and frequent, and all I wanted was an end to the misery.

All of creation groans for now, but King Jesus is coming back, and our groanings will turn to shouts of joy. Are you longing for that glorious day?

Romans 8 says that all of creation is in labor, groaning in pain as the day of Jesus’ return draws nearer. Does it seem like some of the problems in this world just keep getting worse? Natural disasters,

## Pray and Reflect

Read carefully through the words to the hymn “Joy to the World” and think about the message in relation to Jesus’ second coming.

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## Dec. 23 | Day 25

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For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory. ...

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. (Romans 8:14-17, 22-25, New International Version)

My husband and I were emotionally and spiritually exhausted as we held each other that rainy April day, grieving a failed adoption. After a yearlong rollercoaster, our agency told us the situation was

hopeless. They were cutting ties with the woman who’d chosen us to adopt her baby due in May. We could start the process over again. But the money was gone, and we weren’t ready to give up on the baby and the mother we’d prayed for every day since we’d been matched.

The most immediate answer to prayer I’ve ever experienced came when our agency called right then to tell us our baby was coming early and the adoption would happen after all.

...God wants us to know how He loves us and adopted us as His children. We belong to our earthly parents for a lifetime, but we are God’s children for eternity.

No one adopts a child by accident. It’s a long, costly labor of love. My husband and I brought our daughter home this year, and it cost us in more ways than you could imagine — emotionally, financially and physically.

There were many times when I wished to trade it all for even the worst pregnancy experience. But I would have missed out on the wonder that God went through even greater agony to adopt us, paying the ultimate cost of His Son.



If you asked me if I loved my daughter as much as I would love my “real” daughter or my “own” child, I would say, “She is my real daughter, my own child.” As she grows up, I hope she understands that. In fact, it will break my heart if she doesn’t.

In a much greater way, God wants us to know how He loves us and adopted us as His children. We belong to our earthly parents for a lifetime, but we are God’s children for eternity. He looks at each of us and says, “You are my own.” He gave everything to make us His, and He promises He’ll take us home.

### Pray and Reflect

How does it encourage you to consider that God wants to be your Father for eternity? Are you longing for His return?

Hayley Martin and her husband, Cliff, live in the Los Angeles area. Hayley serves on the Communications team with International School Project. They adopted their first child, Georgia Rose, in April and thank God for her every day.



## Dec. 24 | Day 26

Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.”  
(Romans 13:11-12, English Standard Version)

If you knew that Jesus Christ was returning tomorrow, what difference would it make for you today?

The present time of darkness includes a pandemic, injustice and sadness. The world’s problems loom large in our view. But these will all come to an end.

The day is drawing near when Christ will come a second time. Now is the time to wake up. The morning is coming — not just Christmas morning, but the morning when you will see Jesus face-to-face.

The day Jesus comes back will be a day all will see Him. Believers in Him will celebrate as they hear Him read their name from the Book of Life. We will rejoice! But there will be others whose names will not be read.

If you knew that Jesus Christ was returning tomorrow, what difference would it make for you today?

Right now, the Lord gives us the privilege and responsibility to do everything in our power to see that those names are as few as possible — to tell the world of His great love, of why He came on Christmas Day.

Paul writes that we should cast off the works of darkness — actions that are performed in the dark, like violence and sin. His appeal is to put on the armor of light, showing love to others and holding fast the truth that Jesus is coming again.

Are you ready?



## Pray and Reflect

Reflect on Christ's second coming and the fact that you can look to a future that will be free of disease, violence, injustice and heartache. How can you experience His presence and His purpose for you to reflect His love to all around you until that day comes?

Jan Stewart serves as a journalist with Cru. She has had an interest in creative writing ever since her high school newspaper column days. She hopes to inspire hearts toward Christ.



# Christmas

Dec. 25 | Day 27

Joy to the world, the Lord is come;  
Let Earth receive her King!

confidence and hope as we eagerly await Jesus and the Kingdom He will bring.

Today we celebrate the birth of Jesus!  
Our King came!

Here are a few of those promises:

We celebrate His long-awaited coming more than 2,000 years ago as the Savior whom God promised. We celebrate His coming into our lives personally because of His good grace. And we celebrate the future return of Jesus to take His rightful place as King of all creation.

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. Before Him will be gathered all the nations. (Matthew 25:31-32, English Standard Version)

You can celebrate because you have confidence that God will fulfill His promises. He showed He was trustworthy by fulfilling more than 300 prophecies through Jesus' life on Earth.

We celebrate His long-awaited coming more than 2,000 years ago...

We celebrate His coming into our lives personally...

And we celebrate the future return of Jesus to take His rightful place as King of all creation.

So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him. (Hebrews 9:28, ESV)

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also.” (John 14:1-3, ESV)

You can celebrate because the promises of the future return of Jesus will be fulfilled as well. God's track record as the Promise Keeper gives us

Celebrate today knowing that Jesus came and is coming back. And on His return, like the wise men in Matthew 2:11, you will have an opportunity to bow down and worship Him.

The best is yet to come.

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Marie Dell hails from South Africa and is currently exploring the Sunshine State, Florida, while she and her husband are working as global representatives at the headquarters of Cru®. She is passionate about Jesus, cats, knitting and her two teenage children.

