



WHEN HEAVEN CAME DOWN

AN ADVENT DAILY DEVOTIONAL

NASHVILLE
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH



CONTENTS

Introduction - The Echo of Exodus.....	3
--	---

Week 1: Out of Darkness.....	6
------------------------------	---

December 1: A Light Has Dawned
December 2: The Star of Bethlehem
December 3: The Disturbing Question
December 4: Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh
December 5: Hope Has A Name
December 6: Mary's Faith

Week 2: At Just The Right Time.....	16
-------------------------------------	----

December 8: The Magnificat
December 9: The Rescue
December 10: A Sovereign Decree
December 11: From the Cradle to the Cross
December 12: The War To End All Wars
December 13: No More Sighs, No More Sorrows

Week 3: From Grumbling to Joy.....	24
------------------------------------	----

December 15: Why Jesus Came
December 16: The Shadow and The Real
December 17: What Advent is All About
December 18: Life and Death
December 19: Fullness at Christmas
December 20: Tell the Truth

Week 4: Bread From Heaven	34
---------------------------------	----

December 22: Christmas Destruction
December 23: Born That Man No More May Die
December 24: Heaven on Earth (Christmas Eve)
December 25: The Good News of Christmas
December 28: The Glory That Never Ends

Note: On Sunday December 28, We will not have Connect Groups. Our morning Worship Gathering will be in the Sanctuary at the normal time of 10:30 a.m.

For the most updated Christmas information please visit us online at
NashvilleFirst.org/Christmas.

When Hope Came Down, Advent Devotional was written by
Nashville First's Senior Pastor Dr. Thomas West

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Unless otherwise noted, printed Scripture passages are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

WELCOME TO ADVENT

Of all the seasons on the Christian calendar, Advent probably feels the most familiar. Many people, regardless of faith, have used an Advent calendar – the ones with little windows to help you count down the days until Christmas.

Even though Advent is certainly about anticipating the coming of the Messiah, we don't seem to be very good at it, and what we generally call "Advent" looks pretty different from what the Church historically has called "Advent."

ADVENT

Formed from a Latin word meaning "coming" or "arrival," Advent is the traditional celebration of the first advent of Jesus in humility and the anxious awaiting of His second advent in glory. The season is a time for remembering and rejoicing, watching and waiting.

The Advent season is a four-week season leading up to Christmas. It is a time of preparing for Christmas. It's about stepping into the shoes of the Israelites, longing and crying out for the long-expected Messiah to come. It's about reflecting on our sin, shortcomings, and our need for a Savior. It's about looking around at our broken world and hoping for the second coming of Jesus.

THE ECHO OF EXODUS

This Advent, we're listening for the echo of Exodus—the sound of God drawing near to a weary people once again. The story of Israel's deliverance isn't just ancient history; it's the rhythm of redemption that still shapes the world.

The same God who saw His people's pain, heard their cries, and came down to rescue them has now come to us in Christ. Bethlehem is another burning bush moment: the holy ground where divine fire meets human frailty. Each candle we light retells that journey: from darkness to light, from slavery to freedom, from absence



to presence. Advent invites us to rehearse that deliverance story until it becomes our own. The God who came down long ago is welcomed anew into the wilderness of our everyday experiences.

WHEN HEAVEN CAME DOWN

Our theme this year, When Heaven Came Down, captures the wonder of the incarnation—the breathtaking truth that God did not stay distant, but entered the story Himself. Heaven bent low and took on flesh. The infinite became infant. The glory that once filled the tabernacle now fills a manger, and through the Spirit, fills our lives. Advent reminds us that the Christian life begins not with our ascent to God, but with His descent to us. This is a season to recover awe and see that Christmas is not sentimental nostalgia, but divine invasion. Heaven came down to heal earth's wounds, to save us from our sins, to redeem our stories, and to dwell among His people once more.

DECONSTRUCT AND RECONSTRUCT

As we remember and enter this story — the coming of Jesus Christ — we deconstruct and deny the false stories we find ourselves caught up in, especially those connected to our culture's concept of Christmas: individualism and consumerism. Instead, we reconstruct and embrace the true story of the gospel in our lives, specifically the focuses and themes of Advent. We recognize the weight of sin personally, corporately, and cosmically. We realize why we need Jesus Christ, Imman-

uel, to dwell among us, restoring and reconciling creation back to the Father by the Spirit. Celebrating the Son of God coming as a gift, not to be served but to serve, we respond out of praise and gratitude, using this season to serve and to give to others.

INTRODUCTION TO THIS RESOURCE

The lights are up around town, the music is playing, and the air hums with anticipation. Even those who don't consider themselves particularly religious can't help but mark this time of year. Yet beyond the lights, gatherings, and gifts under the tree lies something infinitely deeper — a story that refuses to fade.

Christmas isn't going anywhere. No matter how many headlines change, no matter how cynical the age becomes, this story endures. It's the story of God refusing to remain distant. When the world was darkest, light broke in. When humanity was lost, love arrived wrapped in flesh. The message of Christmas is not seasonal nostalgia; it is the steady heartbeat of Christian hope: God with us.

This little guide is meant to help you slow down and meditate on that good news. Each reflection pairs Scripture with a brief meditation to help you fill your mind, not empty it — to think deeply, pray honestly, and see freshly. Whether you read this in the quiet of morning, between the noise of errands, or by candlelight at night, let it reorient your heart toward the center of it all: Jesus Christ, the gift of God's love.

This guide is meant to accompany the rhythms of your daily life, your worship gatherings, and your celebrations at home. Here are three ways to use it well:

DAILY DEVOTIONALS

Each day offers a short meditation designed to stir your affections for Christ and deepen your longing for His presence. Read them in the quiet of morning, during a lunch break, or before bed — anywhere you can pause long enough to listen. Every reflection pairs a passage of Scripture with a few paragraphs of theological and devotional insight to help your soul slow down, remember, and rejoice.

SUNDAY SERMON GUIDES

“Open Bible & Open Life” is becoming the core of our Connect Groups. We want to find our way into that rhythm each Sunday in our Connect Groups.

Each week in Advent, we gather around one theme — *Out of Darkness, At Just the Right Time, Grumbling Turned to Joy, Bread from Heaven in the House of Bread, and The Glory That Never Ends.*

These weekly sermon notes and Scriptures are designed to help you prepare your heart before Sunday and stay engaged throughout the week. They’re a summary of where we’re going and an invitation to the journey. Use them to pray through the themes, discuss them with family or friends, and let each Sunday deepen your anticipation for the next.

KEY DATES AND GATHERINGS

This season is full of sacred moments, from our churchwide worship gatherings to Christmas Eve candlelight and beyond. You’ll find brief reflections and reminders throughout this guide that correspond to these special days. They’re included to help you not just attend events, but to worship through them — to see every meal, song, and prayer as part of the larger story of heaven coming down.

Advent is a journey. Each day is an opportunity to take a step closer to the heart of God. Use this guide not as another item on your list, but as a companion for the road, a steady reminder that even now, Heaven is drawing near.

So, come along — let’s trace the good news of Christmas, one day at a time, until our hearts are ready again to receive the One who came down.



OUT OF DARKNESS

EXODUS 2:23-25; 3:7-9, JOHN 1:1-5, LUKE 1:78-79

ECHO OF EXODUS

The book of Exodus begins not with victory, but with silence. God's people groan under oppression, and heaven seems still. But then: *"God saw... God heard... God remembered... God knew."*

Before a single plague, before a parted sea, before Moses speaks a word, the story turns because God sees. Hope is born in the dark, not the daylight. The same God who saw Israel's tears sees ours. Even when we can't trace His hand, we can trust His heart.

GOSPEL FULFILLMENT

Centuries later, another silence hung over the world. The prophets had gone quiet. The night was long. But into that same darkness, John announces: *"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."*

The God who saw Israel's misery now steps personally into it. At Bethlehem, the light of heaven pierced the world's deepest night, and the promise whispered to Moses was finally spoken in full: I have come down to deliver them.

BIG IDEA: God sees us even when we cannot see Him. His light still breaks through the dark.

OPENING VISION

This Advent, your Connect Group is joining the great story that runs from the groans of Exodus to the glory of Christmas.

God has always been the One who draws near, who sees, who moves toward the darkness. This first week sets the tone: God sees our pain before we even pray, and His light is already on the move. As you open your Bible this week, open your life, too. What parts of your story still sit in shadow? What corners of our city still need hope? God's promise is not escape from darkness, but His presence within it.

THE STORY

In Exodus, God's people groaned under oppression. They felt unseen, unheard, forgotten—yet the text says, *"God saw... God heard... God knew."* That same divine awareness echoes into Bethlehem's night sky: *"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light."*

Advent declares that darkness doesn't get the last word. When heaven came down, light took on skin and stepped into our world. We follow a God who still walks into dark places. If He lives in us, then Nashville should be a little brighter because we're here.

WEEK 1

HOPE

OPEN BIBLE

Read and reflect together on these passages:

- **Exodus 2:23–25; 3:7–9**
What does God’s response to Israel’s cries reveal about His character?
- **John 1:1–5**
How does Jesus embody that same light and compassion?
- **Luke 1:78–79**
What does it mean that God’s “tender mercy” guides us into peace?

OPEN LIFE

1. Where do you see darkness—personally, relationally, or in our city—that needs the light of Christ?
2. How does it encourage you to know that God sees before we even cry out?
3. When have you felt unseen, and how did God meet you there?
4. What does it look like to carry this “light of hope” into your neighborhood, workplace, or family this week?
5. As a group, how can we help our city sense that God lives on their street?

CHURCH CONNECTION

When heaven came down, light began to spread. As we enter Advent, we start not

with cheer but with confidence: the God who saw Israel still sees Nashville.

He still hears the city’s cries and moves toward its people. This is the hope that builds churches, renews hearts, and re-vives cities.

CONCLUSION & SENDING

The story of Advent begins in the dark, but it doesn’t stay there. The God who saw His people in Egypt now walks our streets. Open your Bible, open your life, and carry His light into the places He sends you.

NOTES

DECEMBER 1, 2025

A LIGHT HAS DAWNED

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

Isaiah 9:2

This world is a dark place.

The dark skies over Nashville are beginning to glitter with lights. Throughout towns and neighborhoods, and in our homes, we hang lights to brighten our spirits. We bombard the darkest season of the year with light. Even when we walk into rooms in the late afternoon, the first thing we must do is turn on a light.

Isaiah 9:2 points us to this light that has “dawned.” This light didn’t spring up from us or among us...the light came to us from the outside. That’s the good news that the Bible tells. We are not living in a world where we supply the light for our ultimate problem – light comes to us from outside ourselves.

The darkness in Isaiah 9:2 means both that the world is dark and that we are in the dark. We don’t have the resources, plans, strategies, or solutions to eliminate the darkness. This may be a hard truth to come to terms with, but it is the essential truth that allows the rest of Christmas to make sense.

Christmas is the most realistic attitude toward the world. In a dark world, we really do need help from the outside. The world that Jesus was born into was full of suffering, vanity, violence, abuses of power, refugees on the run, ruthless dictators, and uncertainty. There’s much talk of ‘the magic of Christmas,’ but first, before any kind of magic or hope has dawned, there was a bleak world, a real world much like our own. Before Christmas is anything else is simply realistic.

The good news of Christmas is that light has come into our dark world. Jesus is the light of truth that has come into the world who shares His light with all of us (John 1:9). The lights at Christmas are a reminder of this fact. In the deep darkness, a light has dawned.

DECEMBER 2, 2025

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

Matthew 2:1-2

A star in the sky guided the magi to the Son of God. The very same God who spun the stars into existence and calls the stars by name (Psalm 147:4) is the all-powerful One who can hold a star in place and use it as a spotlight to guide His people.

Places matter. Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, a small town five miles south of Jerusalem, previously called Ephrath. In this same town, a man named Jacob buried his wife Rachel many years before (Genesis 48:7). Years after that burial, Boaz married Ruth here (Ruth 1:22). More significantly, Bethlehem was the home of King David and was known as the City of David.

People matter. The prophet Micah predicted that Bethlehem was the place where the Messiah would be born (Micah 5:2). Matthew tells us that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the City of David, emphasizing the royal lineage of Jesus. Places matter. People matter. Names matter. The magi came to visit Jesus in Bethlehem.

The invitation goes out to all peoples. The Christian God is unlike all other gods. He is not a tribal deity for a few people. He is seeking worshippers from every nation and culture. God extended an invitation to these magicians and sages from Persia and Central Asia to come and worship Jesus.

The good news of Christmas is that God guides people of every race and creed. What's better, God uses global – even cosmic – power to get it done. Jesus is the light who has come into our dark world. Jesus makes it possible for people to see who God is and what God is doing in the world. Discovering Jesus means much more than adding a candle to the sitting room table. Discovering Jesus means getting an entirely new sun to light up the solar system of your life. Meditate on these Christmas themes: the City of David, the prediction of Micah, God leading the nations, a star stuck in place, and the Son of God – the Savior of the world.

DECEMBER 3, 2025

THE DISTURBING QUESTION

"Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

Matthew 2:2-3

History tells us that Herod was an unusually violent ruler. He had members of his own family and government murdered to ensure that his absolute power and dominion would go on unchallenged. He heard the report of this baby that wise men wanted to worship and then consulted with scholars to determine the baby's whereabouts. He was disturbed by their question. Claiming he too wanted to worship baby Jesus, Herod in fact wanted to kill him (read Matthew 2 for more).

God was in the dreams. God confronted the magi in a dream and told them to go home by another way, thus tricking Herod. Realizing he had been fooled, the king ordered the execution of all children under the age of two in Bethlehem. The thought of people wanting to worship someone other than him was a thought he couldn't live with...so people would die.

God warned Joseph in a dream. Jesus would have been a victim of this genocidal cleansing if God had not warned Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus. Joseph took Jesus and Mary to Egypt to live in a large expat community. Jesus spent part of His early years as a refugee who fled His homeland under the oppression of genocide. Eventually, Joseph then moved his family back to Judea and settled in Nazareth where Jesus would grow up as a young boy.

Herod reveals the darkness in the heart of humanity. Like Herod, and in different ways, we are all resistant to the claims of God in our lives. We too want all the worship to be focused on us. A supernatural change must take place in our hearts if we are going to seek God.

The good news of Christmas is that "while we were God's enemies we were reconciled to him through the death of His Son" (Romans 5:10). Jesus came into the world to save His enemies. He didn't wait for us to come to Him because we never would. Jesus sought us. He willingly laid down His life for ours on the cross so that we could be free. This good news can be embraced only by faith. Do you believe it?

DECEMBER 4, 2025

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 2:10-11

Perhaps the most memorable tradition of Christmas is the giving and receiving of gifts. Yet some gifts are difficult to receive because they force us to swallow our pride and admit our need. Imagine receiving a substantial check in just a few weeks to cover an outstanding debt from this past year. It could bring incredible joy because a need has been met, but accepting it forces you to be honest and admit that you're in need. The magi brought Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Jesus was not in need of these material items but they help illustrate just the sort of gift that Jesus is to us.

Gold is the gift for a king. In contrast to Herod and Caesar, who were ruling during Jesus' own time, Jesus would be the King who would rule justly but not as a human judge. Jesus is the King who used His platform and power not to exploit people but to love and care for them. Jesus is the true and good king.

Frankincense is the gift for a priest. Jesus belonged to the people of Israel. Frankincense was used by the priests in Israel in their religious worship gatherings. The gift of frankincense reveals that Jesus is the great High Priest who mediates the relationship between God and all mankind.

Myrrh was used to anoint bodies for burial. Later in His life, Jesus was nailed to a cross where he would die for the sins of the world. His body was anointed with myrrh before he was buried in the tomb. The gift of myrrh foretold Jesus' eventual death on the cross where He in His sinless perfection died as a substitute for us.

The good news of Christmas is that Jesus is the gift that fulfills every need – He meets our needs. Jesus is the King, and we need someone to lead us. Jesus is the Priest, and we need someone to go to God for us. Jesus is the Sacrifice for Sin because we cannot be made right with God on our own. He is the king, the priest, and the sacrifice. Christmas is an opportunity to admit our deepest need and accept the gift of Jesus. We simply need to admit our need and accept the gift.

DECEMBER 5, 2025

HOPE HAS A NAME

For 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

Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor. God consults His will in order to provide us counsel. He promises to instruct and teach His people with His eye upon them (Psalm 32:8). If you are in need of guidance, then look to Jesus. He provides the guidance and He receives the glory (Psalm 73:24).

Jesus is the Mighty God. Colossians 2:9 says, "in Christ the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." Hebrews 1:3 calls Jesus "the exact imprint of God's nature." If you're wondering who God is and what God is like, then simply look at Jesus. He is the strong one who stands on your side and works on your behalf.

Jesus is the Everlasting Father. This may sound strange. The Christian God is Trinity: one God in three Persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet there is a real sense in which Jesus is like a father to us. Jesus said, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you," meaning His fatherly affection for us as children. Isaiah 53:10 tells us that "he will see his offspring and prolong his days." Jesus is fatherly in His love and care of us.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Jesus told us that He would provide peace different than the world understands it (John 14:27). We receive peace with God only because Jesus was punished on the cross for us. Isaiah 53:5 tells us, "by his wounds we are healed."

The good news of Christmas is that God's government is a good government. Jesus Christ, this Son of God, was given to us. Behold this glorious King who lives to provide guidance, be our strength in weakness, care for us like a father, and sort out peace between God and our neighbors. Hope has a name: Jesus Christ.



ROCKIN' AROUND THE CHRISTMAS TREE

Friday, December 5

Doors open at 5 p.m. & Worship begins at 6 p.m.

Get ready to party! We're hosting a family-friendly Christmas experience for downtown Nashville! Enjoy music, coffee, holiday treats, crafts, and plenty of photo opportunities. Santa will be there for free pics! Invite a friend and bring the family!

NashvilleFirst.org/Christmas

DECEMBER 6, 2025

MARY'S FAITH

'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.' 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled.' Then the angel left her.

Luke 1:34-38

The only thing more astonishing than the angel's message to Mary (Luke 1:34-35) is that Mary actually believed the message! She had faith in God. Mary was a young, unmarried girl. She lived in a small part of a nowhere place called Nazareth. And in that small and unassuming place, God sent a message to Mary through an angel. Remarkably, Mary believed the angel's message. She does not ask whether the thing might take place, only how. Mary heard and trusted God's word to her. Faith involves hearing, trusting, and obeying God.

Reading of Mary's trust in God teaches us that faith is based on words. The angel told her that "no word from God will ever fail" (Luke 1:37). Mary believed what God spoke to her through an angel. Mary trusted what God was saying even though she could not see the event that was promised.

Trusting God means that we also obey God. Having faith, for Mary, was more than an intellectual assent to the angel's words. Mary responds, "May your word to me be fulfilled" and offers herself to be used by God. Mary is a model of hearing, trusting, and obeying God. We are part of a story full of men and women who obeyed God when they had no guarantee for how things would turn out.

The good news of Christmas is that God offers us the free gift of faith. The Bible teaches us that faith is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8-10). There's no room for boasting before God or others. Salvation is by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ. Even the faith necessary to save us is a gift that God freely gives to us. Marvel at Mary's faith and take a moment to examine whether you are hearing, trusting, and obeying God in your own life.

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling
among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the
one and holy Son, who came from the Father,
full of grace and truth. Out of his fullness we have all
received grace in place of grace already given.*

John 1:14, 16



AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME

EXODUS 13:19, LUKE 1:68-72, 2 CORINTHIANS 1:20, GALATIANS 4:4-5

ECHO OF EXODUS

As the Israelites left Egypt, they carried the bones of Joseph with them which was a powerful symbol that God keeps His promises. Even across generations, His covenant faithfulness endures.

GOSPEL FULFILLMENT

When the time was right, God fulfilled every promise in Christ. “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son...” (Galatians 4:4). The same God who remembered Joseph in Egypt remembered His people in Bethlehem.

BIG IDEA: *God’s timing is never late. Every promise He makes finds its “yes” in Jesus.*

OPENING VISION

Advent calls us to remember that God’s promises ripen in His time, not ours. Advent peace doesn’t come from control—it comes from confidence that God remembers. He hasn’t forgotten His promises or His people.

This week, as your group opens the Bible, open your life as well. Where are you waiting for God to act? Where does peace feel just out of reach?

THE STORY

The story of Exodus reminds us that God is not in a hurry, but He is never slow. Even as Israel carried Joseph’s bones through the wilderness, they were living proof that God remembers. Each promise He makes has an appointed hour.

Centuries later, at just the right time, heaven broke its silence. Christ came not a day too early or too late. Every longing heart, every weary prayer found its answer in Him. The same faithfulness that moved through Egypt and Bethlehem is still at work in our city today.

As a church, believing that God is in control of the timing can give us peace. We can rest, even when the path feels long, because God has perfect timing for His redemptive work—both in our lives and in Nashville.

OPEN BIBLE

Read and reflect together on these passages:

- **Exodus 13:19**
Why was it important for Israel to carry Joseph’s bones? What does this teach us about trust across generations?
- **Luke 1:68–72**
How does Zechariah’s song show God’s memory of His promises?

WEEK 2

PEACE

- **2 Corinthians 1:20**

What does it mean that all of God's promises find their "Yes" in Christ?

- **Galatians 4:4–5**

How do you see God's perfect timing in the coming of Jesus?

OPEN LIFE

1. What's an example of something you waited for that taught you to trust God's timing?
2. How does it give you peace to remember that God remembers?
3. Where in your life or our church are you tempted to rush ahead of God?
4. What promises from Scripture are helping you hold steady right enow?
5. How can our group embody peace for others who are still waiting?

CHURCH CONNECTION

When heaven came down, God proved once and for all that He remembers His people. Our church lives in that promise: God is still at work, unfolding His plan for our city at just the right time. Peace grows when we trust that His timing is perfect—when we wait, pray, and walk faithfully while He works.

Encourage your group to name one area where they sense God's timing at work—personally or corporately—and to pray for patience and peace in the waiting.

CONCLUSION & SENDING

Advent reminds us that waiting time is not wasted time. From Joseph's bones to Bethlehem's manger, the same promise runs through history—God remembers. Peace comes when we stop striving and start trusting. Open your Bible, open your life, and rest in this truth: God's timing is perfect, and His presence is near.

NOTES

DECEMBER 8, 2025

THE MAGNIFICAT

And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants for ever, just as he promised our ancestors.'

Luke 1:46-55

When pregnant women meet, they naturally discuss their expected babies. Some might discuss birthing plans, baby gear, and sleep. In some cultures, expecting mothers might actually sing a song or hum a lullaby. Luke 1:46-55 tells us about the very song that Mary sung over Jesus as He was in her womb. Mary's song is one of the best known in Christian history, often known by its first word in Latin: the "Magnificat."

The song is anchored to one central theme: Mary's Son is going to bring some down and raise others up. Notice the rhythms of her song...

First, God has blessed Mary in her "humble state" (Luke 1:46-49). God lifts up the humble - people with nothing to contribute, who are unimpressive in appearance and are morally messed up. Mary's Son will lift up the humble.

Second, Mary's song also tells us that God brings some people down. While the humble will be recognized and lifted up, the proud will be scattered. Pride is fed by our successes and an overly optimistic view of ourselves. Mary's Son will scatter the proud.

The good news of Christmas is that Jesus is tender and serious. We rejoice at the kindness Jesus had to Mary and all who are humble. We also take the warning to examine our hearts and flee from pride. Mary's Son is worthy of all of our attention, our words and our deeds - and yes, He is worthy of the songs that we sing.

DECEMBER 9, 2025

THE RESCUE

"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us..."

Luke 1:68-71

Christmas comes with many beautiful trappings. There are Christmas movies, songs, and an overall mood of merriment that seems to take over. For many, Christmas is about friendship, neighborliness, family time, and kissing under the mistletoe. There's a sense of goodwill and peace that is cherished and extended. Beneath the toys and tinsel there's a real tension that needs to be acknowledged.

Christmas is about rescue from bitter enemies. Some may think that Christmas cheer can be spoiled by talking about hatred. But we must, because there is no cheer while the tension remains unchecked. Christmas is about the people of God being rescued. Many will read this and not feel like they are surrounded by people who hate them (although some will). Every Christian has a great enemy, who is a murderer and a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). And still, the world and our own selves form more of a threat to our true happiness and joy than we realize. While Christmas is a time for celebration and rejoicing for many reasons, the deepest reason to celebrate is because God has decided to send Jesus to rescue and redeem.

Luke 1:68-71 tells us about the song that Zechariah sang over Jesus. Filled with the Holy Spirit, he sings of the fact that God's people are "redeemed" (1:68). Notice that he understands the act of redemption in the past tense. This is because the mind of faith considers a promised act of God already accomplished. These are the words of a man who has learned to take God at His word.

The good news of Christmas is that we can be rescued! From our enemies, from a flawed world order, and the bad parts of our own selves - we can be delivered. The more aware we become of these enemies, the more readily we will join Zechariah in glad songs of praise to God. Jesus came at the first Christmas so that He might rescue us from our enemies by His obedient life and death.

DECEMBER 10, 2025

A SOVEREIGN DECREE

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.

Luke 2:1-5

It is amazing that God ordained a census to be taken in order for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem. This was no small detail because the prophet Micah predicted that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2-4). To fulfil this prophecy, God put it in the heart of Caesar Augustus that all the Roman world should be enrolled in his hometown. So Mary and Joseph had to leave Nazareth, for a small spot of land in Bethlehem. Places are significant. Nazareth was a nowhere place filled with people the rest of the world would consider to be nobodies.

Though you live in Nashville, you might feel the significance of the place you come from in a very real way. Along with this, living in Nashville does not guarantee success. Have you ever felt little and insignificant in a city with so many people? With all of the big political machinery, industries, migrant growth, and social shifts which put us on edge – it can feel like our little lives aren't even noticed.

The good news of Christmas is that God is a big God for the little people. Proverbs 21:2 says, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will." Scripture is clear that the greatest political forces are being guided by our God. All kings, presidents, premiers, and chancellors of the world follow the sovereign decrees of our Father in heaven. God not only notices you; He knows you. Christian, your life is part of a greater story where God is working all things together for good for those who love Him.

DECEMBER 11, 2025

FROM THE CRADLE TO THE CROSS

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 cloth and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Luke 2:6-7

Christmas is full of memorable songs and sayings. Regardless of why you celebrate Christmas, these words are part of our collective imagination, “There was no room for them in the inn.” Children will sing “Away in a Manger” this Christmas and call this theme to mind.

Have you ever wondered why there was no guest room available to Mary and Joseph? In most societies, all sorts of people would make space for a pregnant woman about to give birth. Why, in all of Bethlehem, was there no safe space for Mary to give birth? We don’t know. Maybe the inhabitants of Bethlehem were especially heartless. Perhaps she was being socially iced out of hospitality because of the whispers to her being a virgin and yet with child. We simply don’t know why the young couple couldn’t find a room.

There’s a difference between what God could do and what He willed to do. God could have used that same power that called for an empire-wide census to open up a bed for Mary. He could have had Jesus born into a wealthy family. Jesus could have turned a stone into bread in the wilderness. Jesus could have silenced the haters with a single word. The question is not what God could do, but what God willed to do. God’s will was that though Christ was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor (2 Corinthians 8:9). He willed to identify with us.

The good news of Christmas is that Jesus was made poor so we can be rich. From His first breath – and with only an animal’s feeding trough for a bed to His last breath in agony on a Roman cross – the Son of God knew what it was to become very, very poor. His costly, obedient, and sin-bearing death opened up God’s treasure trove for us to be made unimaginably rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). From beginning to end, He chose to identify with us.

DECEMBER 12, 2025

THE WAR TO END ALL WARS

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. Suddenly a great company of the heavenly hosts appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.'

Luke 2:11-14

Between 1912 and 1917, Europe was destroyed by the worst war in human history. It was so horrific that people wishfully referred to it as “the war to end all wars.” Little did they know that, within a few decades, this period of carnage would have to be renamed “World War 1” to separate it from an even bloodier season of conflict.

Our hearts ache for peace. Sin entered the world in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the first incident of conflict. Ever since then, peace has been fleeting. Fallen humanity is so prone to violence that a righteous sword is required to restrain us (Romans 13:1-7). Our hearts are hungry for the paradise that we’ve lost. Thankfully, God’s prophets have promised us that a new and better Eden is coming, where “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3). Christians live in a story where war will one day be no more.

Christmas is about the “Prince of Peace” who has come to be our Savior (Isaiah 9:6). As those justified by faith, we now have peace with God (Rom. 5:1). The work of Jesus on the cross not only gives us peace with God but it also makes it possible for us to have peace with one another (Ephesians 2:14, 16). The Christian story makes space and provision for peace between people.

God’s peace to us gives us the power to have peace with one another. This peace is not easy to maintain. If it were, many of Paul’s exhortations would never have been written. Our task as Christians is to increasingly become like Christ, to live worthy of the calling, and to maintain unity (Ephesians 4:3).

The “war to end all wars” has already been fought. It was launched on Christmas, won on Good Friday, and proclaimed on Easter morning.

DECEMBER 13, 2025

NO MORE SIGHS, NO MORE SORROWS

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorry and sighing shall flee away.

Isaiah 35:10

Israel knew what it was to wait. They waited in seasons of bondage to suffering, sin, pain, and injustice. The essence of their hope was not to downplay, justify, or avoid the present pains and sorrows they faced. Rather, hope is the expectation that as real as the pain is now, it will one day feel like a foreign and faint memory for those who hope in Jesus Christ.

Sorrow is everywhere: crawling across the news ticker at the bottom of the screen, coming to us in our news feeds, the sickness and death that haunts our loved ones like a plague, and the temptation and sin that leave us feeling frustrated, defeated, and even hopeless.

Sighing is everywhere, too. We sigh at the exhausting pace of life and the busy schedules we can never optimize and simplify. We sigh at the foolishness we see all around us. We sigh at the sin that seeps in and poisons all it touches: relationships, churches, divisions between Christians that get worse and worse.

A day is coming when our sighing will turn into singing. Our sorrow will turn to gladness and joy – everlasting joy. The words of Isaiah 35:10 are words of healing and hope. We live in the “now” where sighs and sorrows linger. We will eventually live in that “not yet” day where sighs and sorrows will be no more. Until then, we live each day in hope. We long. We wait. Waiting time is not wasted time. The waiting season is where hope is cultivated in our hearts.

A day is coming for the Christian when she or he will sigh no more. That “everlasting joy” that overtakes us in the presence of God will heal every sorrow we carry in our hearts. Maybe we’ll be able to look back and feel gratitude for how the sighs and sorrows made us hungrier for the everlasting feast, and the fullness of joy, that will be ours forever.

FROM GRUMBLING TO JOY

EXODUS 16:1-8, LUKE 2:8-14, PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7

ECHO OF EXODUS

In the wilderness, God's people grew restless and ungrateful. They had been delivered from Egypt but still longed for control. Yet even in their complaints, God provided manna, daily bread for undeserving hearts. The wilderness reveals how easily we forget grace, but also how faithfully God provides.

GOSPEL FULFILLMENT

Centuries later, angels broke into another wilderness night with news that would silence all grumbling: *"I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."* The Bread of Heaven had come down. God Himself entered our complaint-filled world to fill us with His joy.

BIG IDEA: God turns complaint into contentment when we remember who He is and what He's already done.

OPENING VISION

This week, we open our Bibles and our lives to a hard truth: even redeemed people grumble. The wilderness isn't a failure of faith; it's where faith is formed. When heaven came down in Christ, God stepped into our wilderness to teach us that joy doesn't depend on circumstances but on our nearness to Him.

As you gather this week, let the conversation move from honesty about complaint toward discovery of grace. Let your group name the places of frustration, then look together for the daily manna of God's mercy.

THE STORY

The grumbling of Exodus echoes loudly in every generation. We are not so different from Israel: freed, yet forgetful; loved, yet restless. And still, God feeds us. Every morning, new mercies fall like manna, testifying that His grace is stronger than our complaints.

When Christ came, He entered a complaining world and turned our despair into doxology. Joy is not denial of pain; it's defiant gratitude in the presence of God. Paul would later write, "Rejoice in the Lord always." Joy is not optional for the people of God; joy is hard evidence that we trust God.

Joy pushes back against cynicism in our culture and weariness in our own hearts. Joy tells the truth: *God is still good, and He is still here.*

WEEK 3

JOY

OPEN BIBLE

Read and reflect together on these passages:

- **Exodus 16:1–8**
What do we learn about human nature from Israel’s complaints? How does God respond?
- **Luke 2:10–11**
How does the angel’s announcement redefine joy?
- **Philippians 4:4–7**
What practices move us from anxiety and complaint to peace and joy?

OPEN LIFE

1. What “wilderness” do you find yourself in right now—personally, relationally, or spiritually?
2. Where do you tend to grumble instead of trust?
3. What specific provisions has God already given that you may have overlooked?
4. How does Jesus, the Bread of Heaven, meet your deepest hunger for joy?
5. What would it look like for our church to be known for joy in a weary city?

CHURCH CONNECTION

Our city doesn’t need louder grumbling—it needs deeper gladness. As a church, we

resist cynicism by rejoicing in the faithfulness of God, remembering that every day in the wilderness still holds manna from heaven. Let our joy become witness: the sound of a people satisfied in the God who provides.

Encourage your group to practice gratitude daily this week—writing or sharing one thing each day that reveals God’s provision.

CONCLUSION & SENDING

The wilderness is not a detour; it’s the classroom of joy. God feeds His people there—not just with bread, but with Himself. In Christ, heaven came down to prove that joy is possible even here, even now. Open your Bible. Open your life. Let gratitude silence grumbling and joy lead you home.

NOTES

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14 • SANCTUARY, 5 P.M.

CAROL CANDLELIGHT CELEBRATION

Service of celebration with
the Sanctuary Choir, Children's
Choirs, and Orchestra including our
special guests the Adonai School
of Ballet from Huntsville, Alabama

DECEMBER 15, 2025

WHY JESUS CAME

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death -- that is, the devil -- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

Hebrews 2:14-15

This Christmas you might learn a new game, or song – or maybe you need to learn how to assemble a new toy for a child. Things that are new to us are often helped with a simple overview. Hebrews 2:14-15 provides us an overview of Jesus' life. These verses connect the beginning and end of Jesus' earthly life. Let's consider a few of the themes.

We notice the word "children" is taken from the previous verse to refer to the spiritual offspring of Christ. In sending Jesus Christ at Christmas, God has the salvation of His "children" in view. This is why Christmas is about God gathering His children who are scattered abroad in the world (John 11:52).

Jesus Christ existed before He incarnated himself in human flesh and blood. He was Spirit. He was the eternal Word. He was with God and was God (John 1:1; Colossians 2:9). He took on flesh and blood and clothed His deity with humanity. He became, and still is, fully man and remained fully God. This is a mystery in many ways.

The reason Jesus became a man was to die. As God, Jesus could not die for sinners. But Jesus did die for sinners because He became a man. He had to be human in order to die. He was born to die. In dying, He destroyed the devil. How? By covering our sin. As a result, Satan has no legitimate grounds to accuse God's children (Romans 8:33).

The good news of Christmas is that Jesus was born to die for us. Christmas is headed to Easter. God provides the justification that renders Satan's accusations against humanity null and void for all who believe in Jesus. Jesus means to have an immediate effect in the lives of His children. Jesus removes the fear for those who have faith in Him.

DECEMBER 16, 2025

THE SHADOW AND THE REAL

Now the main point of what we are saying is this: we do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.

Hebrews 8:1-2

Plato's *Republic* is probably not a topic that you expected to help you prepare for and appreciate Christmas. Plato argued that this world is a world of shadows, of which the substance can be found in the external world. We read something like this in the book of Hebrews as well. Plato conjured up the idea of a man seeing images on the wall of a cave with light and the reality projecting those images on the wall. The book of Hebrews teaches that many of the Old Testament rituals and systems are actually shadows of which Jesus Christ is the reality.

Hebrews 8:5 says the priests "serve as a copy and a shadow" of the heavenly things.

The Old Testament tabernacle, priests and sacrifices were shadows of the real. The reality has come in the incarnation, life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The shadows have passed away.

Old Testament themes are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The Old Covenant priesthood does abide forever, in Jesus (Hebrews 7:23-24). Jesus Christ is the Passover sacrifice that we've been waiting for (1 Corinthians 5:7). The tabernacle and temple were mere shadows of the presence of God that now abides in everyone who has faith in God (Hebrews 8:1-2; John 2:19-21). Circumcision was merely a way of being marked as God's people and that too is replaced by keeping God's commandments from our hearts (1 Corinthians 7:19). Dietary laws and restrictions are now fulfilled and set free in Jesus (Mark 7:18-19). Finally, the feast days were ways of forming spiritual rhythms and routines for the people of God but they were only "a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17).

The good news of Christmas is that the shadows are fulfilled in the real Jesus Christ. Religious rituals are like a shadow of the great and glorious person of Jesus. Christmas means we can look from the shadow to the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). This Christmas, follow the shadows to Jesus.

DECEMBER 17, 2025

WHAT ADVENT IS ALL ABOUT

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Mark 10:45

What is all of this really about? Why do Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus and spend this whole season building up prayerful anticipation? Why do we make such a big deal about this? One of the reasons that Christians continue to cultivate this longing and expectation for Jesus is that Jesus is the only hope of having our hearts and lives genuinely transformed. Our lives are transformed in proportion to how much of Jesus we can manage to see and behold (2 Corinthians 3:18). So, we look to Jesus.

Christmas is about the glory of God coming into the world. Jesus is “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact representation of his being” (Hebrews 1:3). We celebrate Christmas because God has taken on human nature and become a man.

Christmas is about the “fullness of time” that had been prophesied long ago that the ruler of the world would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Christmas is when we remember the names of this wonderful child: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). He is the anointed one, the Son of David, the true King (Isaiah 11:1-4).

Remarkably, Christmas is about the fact that this son came to earth to serve us. Let that sink in. In a world full of takers, Jesus came to give. Whereas human hearts all across the world beat to the rhythm of, “Get all I can. Can all I get. Sit on my can.” He came to serve and to give His life for us.

The good news of Christmas is that Jesus has come to serve us. He served us most gloriously by giving His life all the way to the point of death so that we could have life (Isaiah 53:1-9).

Jesus gave Himself to die for you and to serve you all the rest of eternity. This is the best news on offer. Receive this. Place your faith in Jesus Christ. Trust Him.

Trust Him with your life.

DECEMBER 18, 2025

LIFE AND DEATH

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

John 10:10

Weirdly, the warmth of Christmas has a way of bringing back the coldness of losses. The same holy season can sweeten the mood and make things better while also reminding us of pain and loss. As much as Christmas is a time of celebration for some, others feel the season with an incredible sense of loss.

Emotional and spiritual wholeness is not found by blocking the painful and pointed moments from the last year. Don't block them. Let them in. Feel, don't flee.

You have an enemy that is hell-bent on stealing your joy. Jesus tells us of an enemy that lives to steal, kill, and destroy. Emotionally and spiritually it's very helpful to go ahead and name the devil in your story and acknowledge the job description that Jesus gives him. If we don't name the enemy, then we'll end up giving credit of his work to someone else in our lives.

Jesus came to give instead of steal, give life in place of death, and build up rather than tear down. The schemes of Jesus are antithetical to those of our enemy in every single way. Jesus came to give life. What a beautiful and important theme for us this Christmas.

Jesus is shown to be our shepherd in the context of John 10. The shepherd knows how to guard and cultivate the life of his flock. When Jesus sees the wolf coming, he doesn't run away. He steps in front of the sheep. Five times in four verses Jesus promises to lay down His life for his sheep (John 10:11, 15, 17, 18). His death is our life.

The good news of Christmas is that Jesus is the good shepherd who abundantly provides for his sheep. Jesus knows how to settle and rest His people. He knows how to keep them away from poisonous traps and how to take them to good water to drink. He is the true provider who ensures that His own are taken care of in every way. The only qualification for being one of Jesus' sheep is following Him wherever He leads. The Good Shepherd knows what is best for the sheep.

DECEMBER 19, 2025

FULLNESS AT CHRISTMAS

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and holy Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given.

John 1:14, 16

Some people can't help but have big hopes and expectations at Christmas. This is the time of year when that deep longing in our hearts seems to become finely attuned and in focus. We want our lives to matter. We long for significance and meaning. We want to know that we matter. In some weird way, we want to be full and fulfilled.

Jesus is the only place where we can be fulfilled. That's a bold claim. Fullness is found in this Word sent from God. The term for this Word is the Greek word *logos* referring to the wisdom of God. This Word became a person and He is the singular place where we can be fulfilled.

The Word became flesh as a means of pursuing us with His fullness. God sent His own Son, not an angel, to mediate this fullness to us. The Son is full of grace. We are invited to draw near to this One who has already drawn near to us in order to experience the fullness that He offers.

Paul prayed that we would experience this fullness (Ephesians 3:14-19). Experiencing the fullness of God requires our redeemed hearts to be strengthened and our redeemed minds to be expanded. The goal is that we would experience the fullness of God -- the spiritual comprehension (experience) of the fullness of the love of Christ.

The good news of Christmas is that we can experience the fullness of Christ's love for us. Take some time to seek this experience of fullness. Pray with Paul that you would "be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:14-19). You can know in your heart the genuine outpouring of grace upon grace. The key to having something to share with others is having first received something that we can give. The fullness of God is the fountain from which Christians draw to give to others who are in need. This is all a work of God's grace to us. Grace upon grace.

DECEMBER 20, 2025

TELL THE TRUTH

"You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

John 18:37

It's helpful when someone just says it. Maybe you've found yourself around with a friend or family member and it feels like there's something that needs to be said but it just won't be uttered. In John 18:37 Jesus just says it. He tells us why He was born and came into the world. This beautiful Christmas text was actually from the end of Jesus' life on earth.

The uniqueness of Jesus' birth did not begin with Jesus' birth. Jesus existed before he was in a manger. The personhood, the character, and the personality of Jesus of Nazareth existed before the man Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Only Christianity claims the preexistence of God before being born as a person. This is why we say Jesus is not a creation, but incarnation. The person – not the body, but the personhood of Jesus – existed before He was born. His coming into the world is not the generating of a new person. Try to let that sink in.

The meaning of Christmas in John's gospel is immense. God the Son, who is God, and who is with God, came to reveal God in a way He had never been revealed before. And in that revelation, the main theme is grace. From the fullness of Jesus' revelation of divine glory, we can receive this grace. God "gave his only Son" and that's the heart of Christmas and Easter all wrapped together in one phrase (John 3:16). Jesus invites us to abide in Him so that we will know the truth and be set free (John 8:31-32). So, the meaning of Christmas is that God came into our world to bear witness to the truth in a way that had never been witnessed before.

The good news of Christmas is that Jesus came into this world to tell us the truth. The truth He tells gives light to the darkness of our lives, friendships, and this world. He said that His people will hear the truth in His voice, trust Him, and follow Him (John 10:27-30).



*My sheep hear my voice,
and I know them, and they follow me.
I give them eternal life, and they will
never perish, and no one will snatch
them out of my hand. My Father,
who has given them to me, is greater
than all, and no one is able to snatch
them out of the Father's hand. I and
the Father are one."*

John 10:27-30

BREAD FROM HEAVEN (CHRISTMAS COMMUNION)

EXODUS 16:9-18, JOHN 6:32-35, LUKE 22:19-20

ECHO OF EXODUS

When the Israelites cried out for food, God didn't rebuke them—He fed them. Manna fell like mercy each morning, enough for every household, enough for every heart. In the wilderness, Israel learned that love is not earned; it's given. The same God who parted the sea now fills empty hands with daily bread.

GOSPEL FULFILLMENT

Centuries later, Jesus stood before another hungry crowd and declared, "I am the bread of life." The manna had been a preview. The true bread had arrived—not baked by human hands, but sent from heaven. At the Lord's Supper, Jesus broke bread again, giving Himself to satisfy the world's deepest hunger: *"This is my body, given for you."*

BIG IDEA: *The love of God feeds our deepest hunger. In Christ, God's provision is not what He gives us—it's who He gives us.*

OPENING VISION

This week we open the Bible and our lives to the mystery of love made tangible. In Exodus, love fell from the sky. In Bethlehem, love lay in a manger. In the upper room, love was broken and shared. God's love is not sentimental—it's sustaining. It

meets us at the table, in the wilderness, and in our weariness.

As we prepare to take communion together this Sunday, we remember that love is not an idea to admire but a gift to receive. Heaven came down not to inspire us, but to feed us.

THE STORY

In every generation, God's people hunger. We hunger for meaning, for belonging, for something solid in a world that shifts. Israel's story in the desert exposes our hearts: even surrounded by miracles, we forget the Giver. Yet love keeps showing up. Manna still falls. Grace still multiplies.

When Jesus called Himself the Bread of Life, He redefined love as nourishment. Love is not a feeling we chase—it's a Person who satisfies.

At His table, we taste heaven's provision: the broken body that restores us, the poured-out blood that renews us. The same love that came down at Christmas continues to feed the world through His Church.

OPEN BIBLE

Read and reflect together on these passages:

- **Exodus 16:9-18**
What does God's provision teach us

WEEK 4

LOVE

about His heart?

- **John 6:32–35**

How does Jesus fulfill and surpass the manna of Exodus?

- **Luke 22:19–20**

What does Communion reveal about the nature of divine love?

OPEN LIFE

1. Where do you sense spiritual hunger in your own life right now?
2. How has God provided for you in ways you've taken for granted?
3. What does it mean for you to see Jesus not just as Savior, but as sustenance?
4. How can our church practically demonstrate this by feeding others physically, emotionally, or spiritually?
5. In what ways can our church become a table where Nashville tastes and sees that the Lord is good?

CHURCH CONNECTION

When heaven came down, God didn't just give a sermon—He gave Himself. The love that fed Israel in the desert and the disciples at the table still feeds His people today. As we approach the communion table this week, we do so not as consumers but as recipients of divine love.

And as we leave the table, let's ask God

to show us how we can be the hands and hearts of Christ in a hungry city.

Encourage your group to find one simple way to embody this love together: share a meal, serve at a shelter, or write a note of encouragement to someone in need.

CONCLUSION & SENDING

Every story of love in Scripture ends at a table. In the wilderness, God prepared one. In the upper room, Christ fulfilled it. Now, as His Church, we extend it—one meal, one neighbor, one act of grace at a time. When heaven came down, love became bread. Open your Bible. Open your life. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

NOTES

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21 • SANCTUARY, 4:30 P.M.

KEYBOARDS *at Christmas*

Festive evening of music
featuring 24 hands on six
grand pianos joined by the
Sanctuary Choir with special
guest artist, Joseph Martin



DECEMBER 22, 2025

CHRISTMAS DESTRUCTION

Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work

1 John 3:7-8

Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. While the idea of “destruction” might feel foreign to the popular themes of Christmas, this advent season is a time to consider all Jesus Christ was sent into the world to do.

Human sinning is the focus of these verses. The focus is not on sickness, not on hardships in life, not about being stressed out or overwhelmed – but sin. Verses 5 and 8 tell us what Jesus came to do. Jesus came to take away our sins (1 John 3:5) and destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).

The purpose of Christmas is to eliminate sin, and part of that involves eliminating the works of the devil who leads us to sin. The author assumes the existence of the devil and writes of his origin, activity, power, and overthrow. John 8:44 describes the devil as “not holding to the truth.” Jesus described his malevolent character by referring to Him as “the evil one” (John 6:13). The devil's power is considerable and he has a real and terrible influence in the lives of people (John 8:44; 1 John 3:10). His overthrow was promised in Genesis 3:15 and began with the arrival of the Son of God, whom the devil had “no hold” on (John 14:30). An express purpose of Jesus' coming into the world was to “destroy the devil's work.”

The good news of Christmas is that the works of the devil will be destroyed. Jesus cares for His people so much that He has come into the world to save them from their sins and to destroy the devil who continues to confound people in sin. The devil's overthrow has been a dethronement rather than a decisive destruction. His final defeat will not take place until the last day (Revelation 20:10).

The incarnation was a down payment of the destruction of the enemy who lives to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). Through faith in Jesus Christ and dependence on his Word, we too can become the kind of people who “have overcome the evil one” (1 John 2:13-14, 4:4).

DECEMBER 23, 2025

BORN THAT MAN NO MORE MAY DIE

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God has put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Romans 3:21-26

Why did Jesus come to dwell among us? You know He didn't need to make the effort. He could have left us to our sin, and He would have been just to condemn us. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God our Creator. If Jesus came only to teach us some moral truths, He didn't need to go to the cross. The law had already revealed the character of God in all of His awesome holiness, and righteousness, and goodness.

So why did Jesus come? He came to fulfill the law by living in perfect obedience to His Father and complete love for everyone else He met. He came to walk in faith where Israel had failed. He came to teach us the meaning of His life – and His death. He was born to die so we who believe would live forever. With the birth of Jesus on that holy night came the dawn of redeeming grace.

What does it mean to be "redeemed"? It means we've been purchased for a price. We carried a debt to sin because we rebelled against God's law. And Jesus set us free. But how? In the only way He could, so that God could be just and the justifier at the same time. Jesus offered himself as the substitutionary sacrifice for our sin. He died the death we deserved so that God the just would be satisfied.

What's left for us to do? To receive the greatest gift of all – justification. Jesus takes on our sin, and we get His righteousness. And how do we claim this gift? By faith. You won't find a better gift. God offers us the gift of GRACE: *God's Riches At Christ's Expense*. If you receive this free gift, then Jesus' death counts as yours and you don't have to die.

DECEMBER 24, 2025

HEAVEN ON EARTH

Exodus 40:34-38, John 1:14, Luke 2:11-14, Philippians 2:5-11

The story of Christmas is not about our climb to heaven, but heaven's descent to earth. From the wilderness tent of Exodus to the stable of Bethlehem, God has always been the One who moves toward us. The same glory that filled the tabernacle now fills a manger; the same light that led Israel by night now shines in the face of Jesus Christ.

This night announces what the world has always longed for: God with us. Not far off. Not hidden behind the curtain. Not waiting for us to get it right. But here — among the poor and the searching, in the mess and the miracle, on our streets and in our hearts.

When heaven came down, love moved in. The Creator stepped into creation not with power and privilege, but with humility and hope. He took on flesh so that every broken heart, every dark corner, every forgotten place could be filled with His light.



YOU ARE INVITED

CHRISTMAS EVE

WORSHIP & COMMUNION

DECEMBER 24 · SANCTUARY · 5 PM

DECEMBER 25, 2025

THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRISTMAS

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.

John 1:3-4

No other faith says God became flesh. 1 John 1:1-2 is a sort of court deposition over the evidence that indicates Christmas really happened. Verses 3-4 then reveal what it means for verses 1-2 to be true. John wants the reader to believe in his testimony so they can have two Christmas gifts: fellowship and joy.

The first Christmas gift is fellowship with God. Koinonia means a relationship of mutual sharing. Our English word "communion" carries this idea of deep, intimate, multidimensional bonding and connection. Christmas means that God went to infinite lengths to make Himself known personally. We can know God and have fellowship with Him and one another.

The second Christmas gift is deep, abiding and durable joy. Jesus promised to reproduce His own, unlimited joy in us (John 17:13). This is not merely happiness that fades at the prospect of bad news. This joy is more like the ballast of a massive ship that keeps it steady when the storms of life inevitably come to rock us.

Both fellowship and joy can be ours through spectacularly ordinary means. Many people fail to grasp the greatness of Christmas because it is so ordinary. Christmas means the infinite has become finite; the extraordinary has become ordinary. We miss this fact because we want a spectacle. So it is the greatest irony of Christmas that it is widely embraced by the world and incomprehensible to the world at the same time.

Christmas is about giving and receiving, light and darkness, death and life. All the wonderfully ordinary themes of life wrapped up in this one fact: For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only son (John 3:16).

The good news of Christmas is that fellowship and joy are available to you through the simple, ordinary, and humble act of asking. Ask. Receive. Enjoy. Merry Christmas!



*That which was from the beginning,
which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes,
which we looked upon and have touched with our hands,
concerning the word of life— the life was made manifest,
and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you
the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made
manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we
proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship
with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and
with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things
so that our joy may be complete.*

1 John 1:1-4

THE GLORY THAT NEVER ENDS

EXODUS 40:34-38, JOHN 1:14-16, 2 CORINTHIANS 3:17-18, REVELATION 21:22-24

ECHO OF EXODUS

At the end of Exodus, the glory of God fills the tabernacle so completely that Moses could not enter. The story that began in slavery ends with God dwelling among His people. The pillar of cloud and fire moves before them. It's a visible reminder that God is not a distant deity but a present Redeemer. The book closes with movement, not closure. The journey continues—God leading His people toward promise and presence.

GOSPEL FULFILLMENT

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory." What Moses glimpsed through cloud and fire, the shepherds beheld in the face of a baby. The glory that once filled a tent now fills the life of Jesus Christ. In Christ, God pitched His tent in our neighborhood. The incarnation is the invasion of divine presence into ordinary places—God on our streets, glory in our midst.

BIG IDEA: *The glory of God doesn't fade—it multiplies. In Jesus, heaven didn't visit earth once; heaven began reclaiming it forever.*

OPENING VISION

This week, as the lights dim and the tree needles fall, we open our Bibles and our

lives to the kind of glory that never fades. Advent ends, but the presence of God does not. Heaven came down and it continues to permeate earth.

The story continues wherever God's people carry His presence into the world. For Nashville First, this is our calling: to live as a people of glory in the city, bearing the light of Christ in our homes, workplaces, and streets.

THE STORY

When Moses stood outside the tabernacle, he was witnessing the world remade in miniature: a God who refuses to remain distant. Every detail of Exodus points forward to Emmanuel, "God with us." When Christ ascended, His glory didn't retreat; it spread through His Spirit. The Church became the new tabernacle, the presence of God on the move.

Now, as we close one year and open another, we stand where Israel once stood: between wilderness and promise, between memory and mission. The glory that came down in Christ now calls us forward—to carry that same presence into our city, our neighborhoods, and our next season.

TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

OPEN BIBLE

Read and reflect together on these passages:

- **Exodus 40:34–38**
How does the story of Exodus end, and what does it reveal about God’s heart for presence?
- **John 1:14–16**
What does it mean that we have “seen His glory”?
- **2 Corinthians 3:17–18**
How does the Spirit make us participants in God’s glory?
- **Revelation 21:22–24**
How does the story end—and begin again—in the New Jerusalem?

OPEN LIFE

1. Where have you experienced the presence of God most vividly this year?
2. How has His glory surprised you in ordinary moments?
3. What does it mean for you to be a dwelling place of God’s Spirit?
4. How could you carry the glory of God into your street, workplace, or relationships in the new year?
5. What would it look like for our church to become a visible sign of heaven’s presence in Nashville?

CHURCH CONNECTION

We are not waiting for God to show up—He already has. Now, we live as carriers of that presence, a people who reflect His light in a weary world. When Heaven Came Down has now prepared us for the next chapter: “In Nashville as it is in Heaven.”

The same God who filled the tabernacle still fills His temple—His people. The glory that began in Bethlehem will not end until every street, every heart, and every corner of creation shines with His presence.

CONCLUSION & SENDING

The story doesn’t end at Christmas—it expands. Glory has come, and glory remains. From Exodus to Emmanuel to eternity, the mission of God is the presence of God in every place. So open your Bible. Open your life. Carry the glory. Heaven is already moving in on your street.

NOTES

NASHVILLE

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

EVENTS:

Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree

Friday, December 5, Broadway Chapel & Hub, 6 p.m.

Tuba Christmas

Tuesday, December 9, Sanctuary, 11 a.m.

First Kids Petting Zoo

Sunday, December 14, McGavock Patio, after worship

Carol-Candlelight Celebration

Sunday, December 14, Sanctuary, 5 p.m.

Keyboards at Christmas

Sunday, December 21, Sanctuary, 4:30 p.m.

Christmas Eve Worship & Communion

Wednesday, December 24, Sanctuary, 5 p.m.

OUR VISION:

We exist to help connect Jesus to people,
people to community, and community to mission.