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# Family Advent Guide

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*Nov. - Dec. 2015*

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# Introduction

## *How To Use This Guide*

The primary purpose of all Scripture is to exalt the name of Jesus. Therefore, the Bible is all about Jesus. The Old Testament points to him, the Gospels tell us about him and the rest of the New Testament points back to him. He is the glorious focal point of all scripture and of all creation, *“For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things and in him all things hold together.”* (Col 1:16-17)

We see this truth exemplified clearly in days leading up to and the events immediately following the birth of Jesus. Here in the opening chapters of the New Testament we see promises God made to his people in the Old Testament fulfilled in the coming of Christ. The birth of Christ also sets the stage for all that will come after; the cross, the empty tomb, the day of Pentecost, the conversion of Saul, the spread of the church, and the very hope of our salvation. God *“became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* (Jn 1:14)

During the Christmas season, we turn our eyes to the moment of Jesus’s arrival on earth; not as a triumphant king, but as a baby, born of a virgin, and laid in a manger. In this study we will look at the story of Jesus’s birth in the Gospel of Matthew and see how Jesus’s birth fulfilled ancient prophecy, set the stage for the ultimate defeat of evil, and ushered in a new covenant between God and his people. The story is not a simple one. The account of Jesus’s birth and the events surrounding it are full of danger, suspense, symbolism and the overarching faithfulness of God toward his people. As we read and study these chapters, may we be reminded of the supremacy of Christ in all things and the indescribable faithfulness of God toward us in Jesus Christ our Lord.

## How To Use This Guide

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This guide is written as both a personal study and a family devotional guide. The sessions are written to coincide with each week of Advent, beginning with the Sunday after Thanksgiving and concluding on Christmas Day. Each week will seek to answer a question about Jesus as the Son of God and the long-awaited Messiah.

- Week 1 (11/29-12/5): Who is Jesus?
- Week 2 (12/6-12/12): Why is the name of Jesus significant?
- Week 3 (12/13-12/19): How should we respond to Jesus?
- Week 4 (12/20-12/25): What is the purpose of Jesus' coming?

Each week will have a personal devotional written primarily for adults and older students. The purpose of these is to work in accord with the Sunday morning sermon and to encourage a more in-depth study of God's word<sup>44</sup>. These sessions will include a scripture reading, commentary, questions for personal reflection, and further reading suggestions.

This study will also include a family devotional with the intention being that during the weeks leading up to Christmas, families would gather to read God's word and reflect on its truth. These sessions will be geared toward younger children and will include a family devotional, discussion questions and a suggested family activity.

Our hope is that this resource will be used to minister to you, your families, and our church this Christmas as we seek to exalt the name of Christ above all things in our celebrations and traditions. Merry Christmas and to God be the Glory!

In Christ,

The Pastors of Lake Murray Baptist Church

Nov 29th - Dec 5th

# The Identity Of Jesus

## *Who is Jesus?*

**1** The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

**2** Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, **3** and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, **4** and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, **5** and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, **6** and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, **7** and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, **8** and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, **9** and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, **10** and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, **11** and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

**12** And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, **13** and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, **14** and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, **15** and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, **16** and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. **17** So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

Matthew 1:1-17 (ESV)

The New Testament begins with a long list of names. Of all the ways that Matthew could have chosen to introduce us to his gospel account, he decided to do so through a genealogy. If we're honest, most of us skip right over or at best skim the passages of Scripture that are genealogical in nature. This is probably because genealogies are not important in Western culture. Some of us can trace our lineage back three or four generations, but for the most part, genealogies have little interest to us so

we don't know much about those who came before us. This was not the case in first century Israel. Your lineage was vital to your identity! Following the return of the Jewish people from Babylonian exile and the reconstruction of the temple in 516 B.C., ancestry was religiously, culturally and politically important. When Matthew begins his account of the life of Jesus he wants his readers to know the importance of Jesus' lineage.

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham." (Matt 1:1 ESV) Matthew begins by mentioning that Jesus is a direct descendant of both David and Abraham. This holds particular significance to the Jewish audience because both David and Abraham were recipients of a covenant promise.

In Genesis 12:1-3, God promises Abraham that He will form a covenant people who will receive a promised inheritance and be used to accomplish a global purpose on the earth. Then later in Genesis 15, God says that he will send a King through the line of Abraham who will rule over all the peoples of the earth. Likewise, in 2 Samuel 7, God promises King David that his kingdom will endure until the very end through his descendants and that a son of David will sit forever on the throne. God promises Abraham that one of his descendants will reign as King over all the people of the earth and that one of David's descendants will reign as King forever. This is why the beginning of Matthew is so important. By identifying Jesus as the Son of David and the Son of Abraham, Matthew is clearly establishing for his audience Jesus's identity as the promised King who will reign upon the earth for eternity!

Matthew's genealogy of Jesus is meant to show us that he has a royal lineage. He is not simply a good person or helpful teacher, but the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We see in the genealogy of Jesus the promise of God reach down through generations of kings and kingdoms, prophets and prostitutes, sinners and saints, to culminate in the incarnation of God himself, born to a virgin and laid in a manger. The genealogy of Jesus reminds us of God's faithfulness to His people through all generations and of the sovereign rule of our risen King.

## Time For Reflection:

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1. Like any family history, the genealogy of Jesus is not without some shady characters and less than ideal circumstances. What does the inclusion of these types of people and circumstances in the line of Jesus teach us about how God works and whom he will work through?

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2. Can you think of examples in your life where God has worked things for his glory, in spite of your weakness and sinfulness? If so, spend some time reflecting on the mercy of God and thanking him that he uses sinful people for his righteous purpose.

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3. God made promises to Abraham and to David regarding their descendants. Although neither lived to see God fulfill his promise through Christ, the Scriptures record that they believed God was faithful to his word. How can you be encouraged today by the faithfulness of God to Abraham and David?

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4. All the promises of God find their yes in Christ (2 Cor 1:20). What promises of God do you need to hold most tightly to today? Write down a promise that God has made in the Scriptures (ex: Deuteronomy 31:6 "I will never leave you nor forsake you") and prayerfully ask God to remind you of that promise throughout the week.

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### Further Reading Suggestions:

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Genesis 12:1-3  
Jeremiah 23:5-6  
Ezekiel 37:24-25

# Family Devotional

*\*\*Read this portion together as a family. Let you kids have some fun with the names. Ask them how many names they recognize from other Bible stories.*

**1** This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham: **2** Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac was the father of Jacob. Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers. **3** Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (whose mother was Tamar). Perez was the father of Hezron. Hezron was the father of Ram. **4** Ram was the father of Amminadab. Amminadab was the father of Nahshon. Nahshon was the father of Salmon. **5** Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab). Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth). Obed was the father of Jesse. **6** Jesse was the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was Bathsheba, the widow of Uriah). **7** Solomon was the father of Rehoboam. Rehoboam was the father of Abijah. Abijah was the father of Asa. **8** Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat was the father of Jehoram. Jehoram was the father of Uzziah. **9** Uzziah was the father of Jotham. Jotham was the father of Ahaz. Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah. **10** Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh. Manasseh was the father of Amon. Amon was the father of Josiah. **11** Josiah was the father of Jehoiachin and his brothers (born at the time of the exile to Babylon). **12** After the Babylonian exile: Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel. Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel. **13** Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud. Abiud was the father of Eliakim. Eliakim was the father of Azor. **14** Azor was the father of Zadok. Zadok was the father of Akim. Akim was the father of Eliud. **15** Eliud was the father of Eleazar. Eleazar was the father of Matthan. Matthan was the father of Jacob. **16** Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah. **17** All those listed above include fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile, and fourteen from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah.

Matthew 1:1-17 (NLT)

**D**o you know who your grandparents are? You probably do. What about your great-grandparents or your great-great grandparents? Your family history goes back a lot further than you probably realize. Everybody has a family they come from and your family says a lot about who you are! When we think about Jesus at Christmas time we usually think about Mary and Joseph too, but did you know that Jesus's family goes back a lot further than just his mom and dad?

In fact, Jesus's family can be traced all the way back to a man named Abram. In Genesis 12, God comes to Abram and makes him a promise. God says:



*The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.” Genesis 12:1-3 (NLT)*

At this point in Abram’s life, he didn’t have any children. But God promised to give him a big family, and that through his family every family in the world would be blessed!

Abram (later Abraham) and his wife Sarah eventually have a son they name Isaac and Isaac has a son named Jacob. Many years later, from the same family, a boy by the name of David is born. David becomes king over all of Israel and God makes him a promise too! God says:

*“For when you die and are buried with your ancestors, I will raise up one of your descendants, your own offspring, and I will make his kingdom strong. He is the one who will build a house—a temple—for my name. And I will secure his royal throne forever. Your house and your kingdom will continue before me for all time, and your throne will be secure forever.” 2 Sam 7:12-13,16 (NLT)*

God promises David that a King will come from his family that will reign over the world forever!

Do you remember what Matthew says at the beginning of his book? He says that his story is about Jesus, who is the Son of Abraham and the Son of David. Meaning that Jesus is the King that God promised to David and that through him every family on the earth will be blessed just as he promised Abraham!

At Christmas, we celebrate that God always keeps his promises and that Jesus is the one true King over all the earth.

## Questions for Discussion:

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1. Can you think of ways that Jesus has blessed your family? Share them out loud together!
2. Is it ever hard for you to trust God to keep his promises? If so, why? How does the truth that God always keeps his promises help you to trust him?

3. What are some ways that someone would show honor to a King? How can we show honor to Jesus as the King in our lives?

### Family Activity:

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Create a family tree! Go back as far as you can on either side of your family and share what you know about your parents, grandparents and so on. Talk about what you remember (if anything!) about these family members. Where they lived, what they did, hobbies, anything you can remember or discover! Use this as an opportunity to share how God has been faithful to your family.



Dec 6th - Dec 12th

# The Name Of Jesus

*Why is the name of Jesus significant?*

**18** Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. **19** And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. **20** But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” **22** All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: **23** “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). **24** When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, **25** but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Matthew 1:18-25 (ESV)

Your name is the first part of your identity. If someone were to ask, “Who are you?” Your first response would typically be to tell them your name. Your last name identifies you as a part of a specific family, and your first name further distinguishes you as an individual inside that family. Names are an essential part of communicating to others who you are.

Matthew begins the second section of his gospel account by writing “*Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.*” (Matt 1:18 ESV) The name “Jesus Christ” is a vital clue as to who exactly this child is. Contrary to popular belief, “Christ” was not Jesus’ last name. He was not born to Joseph and Mary Christ. Christ is not a surname but a title. The title Christ means “the Messiah” or “the Anointed One”. In referring to Jesus as “the Christ”, Matthew is communicating to his readers the identity of Jesus as the long awaited Messiah. The name Jesus is also a significant part of his identity. The name “Jesus” is the Greek form of the Hebrew name “Joshua” or “Yeshua” which means “Yahweh saves,” or “The Lord is salvation.” In the Old Testament, Joshua was the leader appointed after

Moses to take the people of Israel into the Promised Land. The name Jesus was a common name in first century Palestine. Parents would often name their child Jesus to express hope that God would once again act to deliver his people as he had done in the Old Testament.

However, this Jesus was different from any other Jesus. Matthew's bestowing upon him the title of "Christ" is our first clue that Jesus had been set apart as God's anointed. Later in the passage Matthew makes a far more explicit reference to unique nature and identity of Jesus.

The angel of the Lord appears to Joseph, telling him that his soon-to-be wife has conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. *"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."* (Matt 1:21) Matthew will go on to directly link this divine command to the prophecy of Isaiah who spoke, *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel."* (Isa 7:14) The name "Immanuel" translates "God with us." Matthew wants his readers to understand that Jesus is God incarnate. John writes in his gospel, *"the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."* (Jn 1:14)

The very name "Jesus Christ" communicates powerful truth. When we speak the name of Jesus, we are speaking of the Messiah, God in the flesh, who came to save his people from death and deliver them into eternal life. We see in the name of Jesus, God's willful desire to communicate the good news of the gospel to those whom he loves. His name is Jesus and he has come to save his people from their sins.

## Time For Reflection:

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1. Read Isaiah 9:2-7. Isaiah calls the coming Messiah, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. In what ways has Jesus embodied these descriptions in your personal walk with him?

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2. The name Jesus is the Greek form of the name Joshua. In the Old Testament, Joshua was called by God to lead the people of Israel into the Promised Land. In what way is the story of Joshua a foreshadowing to the coming of Jesus?

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3. What is Matthew communicating by using the title of “Christ” in reference to Jesus? Why would this have been important to his original audience? Why should it be important to readers today?

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4. The name “Immanuel” means “God with us.” This name speaks to both the humanity and divinity of Jesus. Jesus was God but also man. What encouragement can we draw from the human nature of Jesus? What encouragement can we draw from the divinity of Jesus?

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### Further Reading Suggestions:

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Joshua 1:1-9  
Isaiah 9:2-7  
Hebrews 4:1-16

## Family Devotional

**18** 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. **19** Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. **20** 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. **21** And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” **22** All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet: **23** “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.’” **24** When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. **25** But he knew her not until the child was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

Matthew 1:18-25 (NLT)

**Y**our name is an important part of who you are. Think about your first name and your last name. They both help to identify you. Your last name tells people what family you’re a part of, while your first name tells others who you are inside your family. A name is an important thing to have!

When the angel of the Lord visits Joseph, he tells Joseph that his wife Mary is about to have a baby. The baby will be a very special baby and he will be given a very special name. The angel tells Joseph to name the baby Jesus, because “*he will save his people from their sins.*” (*Matt 1:21*) The name “Jesus” means “The Lord saves.”

Matthew also calls Jesus by another name. He calls him “Jesus Christ.” We might think that “Christ” is a last name like Smith or Jones, but the name “Christ” is a title. It means “the Messiah” or “the Anointed One.” The Messiah is the one God promised would come to rescue his people from their sin.

Long before the angel of the Lord ever visited Joseph and Mary, God promised his people through the prophet Isaiah that the Messiah would come.

*“All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’).” (Isa 7:14 NLT)*

Immanuel, like Christ, is a title meaning “God is with us.” Matthew says that the birth of Jesus is the final completion of the promise that God made to Isaiah. The child “Immanuel” spoken of in Isaiah is Jesus Christ!

The name of Jesus Christ is very important as it tells us many things about him. First, the name Jesus tells us that God will save us from our sin if we will trust him. Second, the title Christ tells us that Jesus is God’s chosen one to do the work of salvation. You and I cannot save anyone from the penalty of sin; only God’s chosen one can do that. Third, the title Immanuel tells us not only is Jesus God’s chosen one to save us, but that Jesus is God!

The coming of Jesus, the Messiah, reminds us that God is with us and God will save us!

### Discussion Questions:

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1. What does your name tell other people about you? Why is having a name so important?
2. What is the meaning of the name “Jesus Christ”? What was God trying to tell us by giving Jesus this name?
3. The name Immanuel means “God with us.” How does it help you to know that God is with us?

### Family Activity

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Talk about the origin of your names. Parents, tell the story of how you got your name (maybe you were named after a relative or a celebrity!) Then tell the story of how you chose your children’s names and why you named them what you did. If you don’t already know, look up what each member of your family’s name means. You might be surprised what you discover!

Dec 13th - Dec 19th

# The Worship Of Jesus

*How should we respond to Jesus?*

**1** Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, **2** saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” **3** When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; **4** and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. **5** They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: **6** “And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” **7** Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. **8** And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” **9** After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. **11** And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. **12** And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Matthew 2:1-12 (ESV)

**T**he Magi visiting the child Jesus is one of the more widely known events of the Bible. We have seen the arrival of these kings from the East depicted in our nativity scenes, sung about in our Christmas carols, and read about in our stories. Yet, for all the popularity of the wise men’s visit, there are many misconceptions regarding who they were and the



significance of their coming. Through detailing the visit of the wise men, Matthew demonstrates for his readers the only appropriate response when confronted with the revelation of Jesus is worship.

First, who were these men? Matthew gives few details regarding the identity of the men suffice to say that they were “wise men from the east” (Matt 2:1). Nowhere does the Bible record how many wise men there were, nor does it tell us from what country they were from. Matthew identifies them as “magi”, which means, depending on their country of origin, they could have been priests, astrologers, sorcerers or dream interpreters. Through the gifts of Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh, we can ascertain that they were probably wealthy, prominent, high ranking government officials from nation(s) east of Israel. Also, contrary to our cultural nativity narrative, the wise men would not have arrived on the night of Jesus’s birth to stand beside the shepherds. Most scholars believe it would have taken nearly a year or more for the wise men to follow the star to find Jesus and his family in Bethlehem. It was a difficult and arduous process for these men to follow the star to the place where Jesus was.

Secondly, why had these men come? The wise men tell King Herod that they have “seen the star” and “have come to worship” the King of the Jews. The fact that these men are not Jews is deeply significant. Remember, Matthew’s gospel account was written primarily to the Jews. However, the first people Matthew records as worshipping Jesus are Gentiles. Matthew uses this event as a means to exemplify the global nature of Jesus’s kingdom reign. He is not only the King of the Jews, but he is the King of all nations!

The response of the wise men to the birth of Jesus stands in stark contrast to the response of Herod. Whereas the wise men seek Jesus that they might worship him, Herod seeks Jesus that he might kill him. The two responses depicted in Matthew 2 are the only two possible responses to Jesus’s claims to be God. There is no neutral ground when it comes to worshipping Jesus as Lord. Either we will submit to and honor him as Lord of all creation or we will seek to crucify him in the name of self-worship. As Tim Keller summarizes, “Either you’ll have to kill him, or you’ll have to crown him. The one thing you can’t do is just say ‘what an interesting guy’” (Keller, Kings Cross pg.62). The wise men came to worship Jesus as Lord. Advent is a reminder to us of our privilege to do the same.

## Time For Reflection

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1. How should the Magi's response to Jesus serve as an example for us?

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2. Today, are you worshipping Jesus as Lord? Or are you seeking to use Jesus as a means to an end? Don't be too quick to answer. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal places in your life where you are not submitting to Jesus's authority and reign.

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3. What larger message is Matthew seeking to communicate to his predominantly Jewish audience by including the worship of the Magi in his gospel account?

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4. Read Psalm 100. What specific ways does the psalmist encourage us to worship the Lord? How can we begin to put these actions into practice in our daily walk?

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## Further Reading Suggestions:

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1 Chronicles 16:8-36

John 4:1-43

Revelation 5:1-14

## Family Devotional

**\*\***Have a nativity scene ready to show your kids. Use an image from the internet or one you have in your home.

**1** Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, **2** “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.” **3** King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. **4** He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?” **5** “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote: **6** And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.” **7** Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. **8** Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!” **9** After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! **11** 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. **12** When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

Matthew 2:1-12 (NLT)

**D**o you know what a nativity scene is? It is a picture or a display of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. Who are the people you see in the nativity scene?

Are there wise men in the picture? Lots of nativity scenes have the wise men present at the birth of Jesus when in fact the wise men probably didn't arrive until Jesus was more than a year old!

Do you know how many wise men there were? Did you guess three? Actually the Bible never tells us how many wise men there were but only that they brought three gifts to Jesus.

The wise men are pretty popular characters in the story of Jesus, but much of what we know isn't from the Bible. So what does the Bible tell us about these men who came to see Jesus? Let's look back at what Matthew has to say:

*“Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.’”* (Matt 2:1-2 NLT)

First, the Bible tells us that they were from the East, meaning they were not Jewish men. In the Bible anyone that wasn't Jewish was known as a Gentile. Many of the Jews looked down on the Gentiles as lesser people. They believed that God was only a God of the Jews and not of the Gentiles.

Second, we see why the wise men came. They tell Herod that they have seen a star and have come to worship the king of the Jews. Many years before, God had spoken through the prophet Balam that a king would arise in Israel and his coming would be preceded by a star.

*“the message of one who hears the words of God, who has knowledge from the Most High, who sees a vision from the Almighty, who bows down with eyes wide open: I see him, but not here and now. I perceive him, but far in the distant future. A star will rise from Jacob; a scepter will emerge from Israel.”* (Num 24:16-17 NLT)

The wise men saw the star and came to worship the King of the Jews! However, Matthew is doing something very important by including the story of the wise men. He is showing us that Jesus is not only the King of the Jews but the King of the Gentiles as well!

When we realize that Jesus is the one true King over all the earth, we should respond in worship. Worship is anything we do to show Jesus that we love him and are thankful to him for coming to rescue us from our sin. Some of the ways we worship Jesus is by singing songs, praying, reading the bible, telling others about Jesus, or obeying what Jesus says to do. All of these are great ways to worship Jesus just like the wise men!

## Questions for Discussion:

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1. What are some things that people believe about the wise men that are not true? Where should we always go to discover what's true?
2. What is Matthew trying to tell us by including the story of the wise men in his book about Jesus?
3. What does the word worship mean? What are some ways that we can worship Jesus?

## Family Activity

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Pick out a few favorite Christmas songs about Jesus and take turns singing those songs of worship together as a family. You don't have to worry about whether you sound good or not! Talk to your children about how God looks on the heart of those worshipping not on the quality of the performance of worship. Pray together and ask God to give your family hearts to worship Jesus as Lord and then pour out your praise to him in song!



Dec 20th - Dec 24th

# The Promise Of Jesus

*What was the purpose of Jesus coming?*

**13** Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” **14** And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt **15** and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.” **16** Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. **17** Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: **18** “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.” **19** But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, **20** saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead.” **21** And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. **22** But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. **23** And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Matthew 2:12-23 (ESV)

**I**n the Old Testament the nation of Israel was God's chosen people. Israel's purpose was to be the conduit through which God's blessing, presence and glory shined forth into all nations. God sought to use Israel as the means by which he would bless all other nations on the earth. God promises to bless Israel, and through her blessing, bless

others. But throughout the Old Testament, the people of Israel consistently reject God's offer of love and blessing in favor of idolatry.

Matthew's purpose in writing is to show, through the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, how Jesus is the true and better Israel. Where Israel failed, Jesus has succeeded.

At the end of Chapter 2, Matthew references three distinct Old Testament prophecies to prove the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and the long awaited Messiah.

After the departure of the wise men, Joseph is warned by an angel of the Lord to flee from Bethlehem into Egypt to escape the wrath of King Herod. Joseph obeys and takes his family into Egypt. Matthew writes, "This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'" (Matt 2:15) Matthew is referencing Hosea 11:1-3, where the prophet Hosea is celebrating the deliverance of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Matthew uses this passage to depict Jesus as a type of Israel, but the true and better Israel. Just as God delivered Israel from their slavery in Egypt, so Jesus would soon deliver God's people from their slavery to sin.

Once Herod discovered he had been tricked by the wise men, he was furious. So furious in fact that he ordered all the male children in Bethlehem two years or younger to be slaughtered. You can imagine the gut-wrenching dismay that gripped the city after this monstrous act. Matthew draws the attention of his readers to the words of Jeremiah the prophet reflecting on the exile of Israel to Babylon. Whereas the section Matthew quotes is mournful, Jeremiah 31 is actually a chapter about the joy and comfort the people of God will experience in the future after their salvation and restoration. Matthew is reminding his readers, though they mourn now, God is setting all things right through Jesus!

Finally, Joseph returns to his hometown of Nazareth with Mary and Jesus. Matthew says this was to fulfill the prophecy "He shall be called a Nazarene." (Matt 2:23) Matthew is not quoting any specific Old Testament passage but instead is picking up on a general theme of the Old Testament prophets. The prophets foretold that the Messiah would be lowly and despised by men. Nazareth was a town that was despised in the time of Jesus. Even one of Jesus's eventual disciples would quip, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" (John 1:46). If you were a first century Jew, Nazareth was the last place you would expect the Messiah to come from. Yet, "*God chose what is low and despised in the world... to bring to nothing things that are.*" (1 Cor 1:28)

Jesus came to fulfill all the promises of God to his people. He came to save his people from their sins and to give them life in his name. We respond now in reverent, humble worship of him and trust that God is faithful to do all that he has promised us in the scriptures through Christ Jesus our Lord. "For all the promises of God find their yes in him." (2 Cor 1:20)



## Time For Reflection:

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1. God's plan in the Old Testament was to bless all nations through his blessing of Israel. His plan remains the same for believers today. God blesses us through Christ that we might bless others. How can you use what God has blessed you with to bless someone else this week?

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2. What are some parallels and similarities between the ways God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt and the way Jesus delivers us from slavery to sin?

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3. Read Jeremiah 31:1-40. What verse(s) stand out to you in this passage? How does Matthew apply this passage to the mourning of Bethlehem in Matthew 2:16-18?

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4. Nazareth was a lowly place and ill-regarded by many in the first century. Why do you think God chose Nazareth as the city in which Jesus would grow up? What might this teach us about how God works?

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## Further Reading Suggestions:

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Jeremiah 31:1-40

Hosea 15:1-3

Isaiah 53:1-12

## Family Devotional

**13** After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother,” the angel said. “Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

**14** That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother,  
**15** and they stayed there until Herod’s death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: “I called my Son out of Egypt.” **16** Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men’s report of the star’s first appearance. **17** Herod’s brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

**18** “A cry was heard in Ramah— weeping and great mourning. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are dead.”

**19** When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. **20** “Get up!” the angel said. “Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead.”

**21** So Joseph got up and returned to the land of Israel with Jesus and his mother. **22** But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod’s son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee. **23** So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

Matthew 2:13-23 (NLT)

**H**ave you ever broken a promise? Or has anyone ever broken a promise to you? It’s not a good feeling when someone breaks a promise. Do you know that God has never broken a promise? When God promises something he always comes through.

In the Old Testament, God made a promise to the nation of Israel. God said that if the people of Israel would obey him, he would make Israel a great nation and bless all the other nations of the world through them. God loved Israel and made them his special people. The people of

Israel however did not obey God. Instead they forgot about their promise to him and worshipped other gods. God had every right to break his promise to Israel because they had disobeyed him, but he didn't. Instead, God followed through on his promise to bless all the nations of the world through Israel by sending Jesus to do what the people of Israel had failed to do.

Matthew writes to us to show us how Jesus is the answer to all God's promises. In the passage you just read, Joseph is warned to run away with his family into Egypt to escape the evil King Herod. Then Herod, furious that he was tricked by the wise men, has all the young boys in Bethlehem killed. When King Herod dies, Joseph is told to return to his hometown of Nazareth. Matthew writes that all of these things occurred so that the promises God had made to the prophets in the Old Testament might be accomplished. Things that God had promised hundreds of years before were coming true in Christ!

Always remember that everything God says is true. Jesus is the proof that when God promises something, we can trust that he will do it. God promises that if we will trust him with all our heart and believe that Jesus is Lord, we will be saved from our sin and made to live eternally in heaven with him. God is a promise keeping God who rescues us from our sin!

### Questions For Discussion:

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1. God promised things to the prophets in the Old Testament that didn't come true until hundreds of years later. What does this tell you about God?
2. God kept his promise to Israel even after Israel broke their promise to God. How can this truth give us encouragement?
3. Has there ever been a time where you trusted Jesus as your Savior and Lord? If not, talk with your parents about what this means. Ask them to talk about when they trusted Jesus for the first time!

### Family Activity:

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Parents, make a promise to your kids to do something fun together (like go get ice cream or drive around to see Christmas lights). Tell them you're going to do it but don't tell them when. The surprise them when they don't expect it with a fun family adventure! Use this activity to teach them that although sometimes we have to wait on God, he always delivers on his promises!

Dec 25th

# REJOICE!

## *Christmas Day*

46 And Mary said,  
    “My soul magnifies the Lord,  
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.  
    For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me,  
    and holy is his name.  
50 And his mercy is for those who fear him  
    from generation to generation.  
51 He has shown strength with his arm;  
    he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;  
52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones  
    and exalted those of humble estate;  
53 he has filled the hungry with good things,  
    and the rich he has sent away empty.  
54 He has helped his servant Israel,  
    in remembrance of his mercy,  
55 as he spoke to our fathers,  
    to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

Luke 1:46-55 (ESV)

**P**erhaps no words better express the appropriate response of believers to the work of God in our lives than the opening words of Mary’s song.

*“My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior.”*

Christmas is a day of rejoicing.

We rejoice that when we could not get to God because of our sin, God came to us. He came not as a righteous judge, like we deserve, but as a humble servant. *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth."* (John 1:14) Immanuel, God with us.

We rejoice that when we could offer him nothing, he gave us everything. Gold, frankincense and myrrh are a paltry sum to offer the one by whom, through whom and for whom all things were created. *"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein"*(Ps 24:1). Though He owns everything and owes nothing, according the riches of his mercy, he gives generously to his children. *"And from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace."* (John 1:17)

We rejoice that the salvation of God in Christ Jesus is the gospel to all who would believe. The Holy Spirit is drawing men and women from every corner of the earth to worship the name Jesus. The child who was born in Bethlehem is the light of the nations, pushing back the powers of darkness and leading those who follow him into life. *"In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it"* (John 1:4).

We rejoice that through the person and work of Jesus, we are no longer slaves to sin, but sons and daughters of God! This was not of our own doing but was a gift of God, by grace, through faith, for good works (Eph 2:8-10). That through our good works others might see God as he truly is and give him the glory he rightly deserves. (Matt 5:16) He came not for the righteous, but the sinner (Mark 2:17). Jesus has redeemed us from the curse of the law by bearing the curse for us, that we might receive the gift of the Spirit by faith. (Gal 5:13-14) Rejoice today that you are free from the penalty of your sin and have been given eternal life! *"He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."* (John 1:11-13)

Take a few moments today to reflect on and rejoice over what God has done in Christ. Allow yourself to stand amazed at the faithfulness of God. Revel in the reality that his mercies are new for you each day. Rejoice that you are no longer a slave to sin but a child of God. Worship him today, Christmas Day, as the King of kings and the Lord of lords!

# Advent Daily Reading Guide

A daily reading for each day of Advent. This guide was originally published in “The First Days Of Jesus” by Andreas Kostenberger & Alexander E. Stewart.

December 1st, Tuesday	<b>Luke 1:1-4</b>
December 2nd, Wednesday	<b>Genesis 49:8-12</b>
December 3rd, Thursday	<b>Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-5</b>
December 4th, Friday	<b>Micah 5:2-4</b>
December 5th, Saturday	<b>Matthew 1:1-17</b>
December 6th, Sunday	<b>Matthew 1:18-25</b>
December 7th, Monday	<b>Matthew 2:1-12</b>
December 8th, Tuesday	<b>Matthew 2:13-15</b>
December 9th, Wednesday	<b>Matthew 2:16-18</b>
December 10th, Thursday	<b>Matthew 2:19-23</b>
December 11th, Friday	<b>Luke 1:5-25</b>
December 12th, Saturday	<b>Luke 1:26-38</b>
December 13th, Sunday	<b>Luke 1:39-45</b>
December 14th, Monday	<b>Luke 1:46-56</b>
December 15th, Tuesday	<b>Luke 1:57-66</b>
December 16th, Wednesday	<b>Luke 1:67-80</b>
December 17th, Thursday	<b>Luke 2:1-7</b>
December 18th, Friday	<b>Luke 2:8-21</b>
December 19th, Saturday	<b>Luke 2:22-40</b>
December 20th, Sunday	<b>John 1:1-5, 18</b>
December 21st, Monday	<b>John 1:6-8, 15</b>
December 22nd, Tuesday	<b>John 1:9-14</b>
December 23rd, Wednesday	<b>John 1:16-17</b>
December 24th, Thursday	<b>Isaiah 52:13-53:12</b>
December 25th, Friday	<b>Revelation 21:1-8</b>

