



READ: Luke 2:6-21 (ESV)

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

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

And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

ENTER THE STORY:

It is ironic that the title for this section of the devotions is "Enter the story," because that is *EXACTLY* what God did when he sent Jesus into our world. Jesus is Immanuel - God with us. He brought the very presence of God *TO US* to allow his people to experience him first hand and to know what God is like.

On the night of Jesus' birth, God himself entered the story he had been writing for thousands of years.

Philippians 2:6-7 says it like this, "...though he was in the form of God, [Jesus] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."

God's timing is one of the most interesting aspects of the Bible. Often, he allows his people to endure incredibly difficult things for long periods of time before he steps in to deliver them. I'm sure we can recall many stories like this, yet we can be sure that God's timing is always perfect, even if we don't understand the "why." But think about this – over the thousands of years between the sin of Adam and Eve and the birth of Jesus, God stayed faithful to his promise to send a Redeemer. The Christmas story is really one BIG promise fulfilled, carrying with it a message from God to all of his children, that in his perfect timing, he will fulfill every other promise he has ever made to us. This is the hope we have in the story of Christmas: hope that may be deferred at times, but that will always reach it's full and final fulfillment in Jesus!

One of the goals in this Advent was to walk a mile in the shoes of those who came before us so that we would feel BOTH the longing and the hope they felt as they waited for the Messiah. There is, however, one more theme that we've seen over and over again that I hope you picked up on.

God is not like us and his ways are different from ours.

A king born in a manger? Who would have chosen that for their grand entrance? The announcement of his birth? Surely that would go to the wealthiest, most influential and important people, right? Nope! It was to shepherds in a field.

Have you ever stopped to wonder why God announced the birth of his Son to shepherds? We have read many prophecies and stories that point to Jesus' second coming, where he will sit on David's throne as the Root of Jesse and rule and reign as King, but we are still waiting for that day.

TODAY, we are celebrating his first coming and Jesus was no ordinary baby. He was the perfect, spotless Lamb of God, sent in the most humble of positions, "...not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28). THIS is why God sent his angels to shepherds to announce the birth of his Son. Jesus fulfilled many promises with his life. He perfectly obeyed God's law and demonstrated to all of us how to walk out our purpose as image bearers who represent God the Father. He did everything with grace and truth, loving the unlovable, and calling sinners out of their sin. But ultimately, Jesus was born to die.

What a joyous feeling we should have, as we celebrate one of the culminating events in our historical faith... God entering our story as Immanuel, the promised Messiah and foretold King from David's line. After all, God's people had waited a *LONG* time for his arrival. It feels like we've been waiting with them, but looming just a short distance away on our calendars is a very different celebration. A gruesome event that results in the death of our beloved Messiah. Every year, they are mere months apart for us. Moments it seems.

From the time we celebrate the Advent of the promised Messiah to the time when we mourn his death on the cross is about 103 days give or take. This seems like a such a stark turn of events, with an entirely different mood and feel to it, but we cannot, and should not completely separate them in our mind because they are connected in the most complex and beautiful way.

When Jesus was born under that Bethlehem star, he brought light into a dark world. We saw this prophesied in Isaiah 9! When God's enemy strikes the Messiah's heel, the world will go dark again as we mourn his death. But Easter is coming! Darkness has NO POWER over light. When Jesus had paid the price for our sin and defeated death once for all, he ascended victorious into heaven to the praise of all the angelic host, once again bringing light into a dark world. With Jesus' resurrection, God fulfills another long-awaited promise of the Serpent Crusher!

Hebrews 2:14-15 says, "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."

This is what we celebrate at Christmas! Our Serpent-Crushing Savior has finally arrived!

Today, as we participate in all of our holiday traditions today, let's bring Jesus into them!

As we look around at all the beautiful, sparkly lights on houses and on our tree, let's remember that Jesus is the Light of the world, and whoever follows him will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life!

As we feast on our Christmas dinners, let's remember that Jesus is the bread of life and whoever comes to him will not be hungry, and whoever believes in him will never thirst. Let's pray that God would develop in us a hunger and thirst for more of his righteousness.

As we give each other gifts and presents, let's remember that God is the ULTIMATE gift giver! He has given us the BEST gift ever in his Son, who paid the price for our sin so that we could enter the presence of God!

PRAY: *God, you are amazing and worthy of all our praise and glory. As we enjoy all of the beautiful celebrations today with family and friends, help us remember that Jesus, our Immanuel, is also our Sacrificial Lamb, the Good Shepherd and our future King!*