

**READ:** Luke 2:6-20 (NIV)

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

ENTER THE STORY:

It is interesting 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! Its what Christmas is all about!

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

We have been journeying back in God's story through the Jesse Tree Advent, and one of our main goals was for you to relive some of the stories in the Old Testament that point to Jesus' first and second coming in a brand new way.

Hopefully, over these past twenty-eight days, you have been able to feel BOTH the longing and desperation and the hope and anticipation the Israelites 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 most important people, right? Nope! It went to shepherds.

Have you ever stopped to wonder why God announced the birth of his Son to shepherds? I'm sure we've heard that in God's kingdom, the last will be first and the first will be last, so he went to the stinky, dirty shepherds instead of the wealthy or famous. I'm sure there is some truth to that, but I think there is more. We have read many prophecies and stories that point to Jesus coming a second time. When that happens, he will sit on David's throne as the Root of Jesse and rule and reign as King, but that has not happened yet. 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 *ALL* of God's laws and showed us what it looks like to represent Yahweh to the rest of the world. He did everything with grace and truth, loving the unlovable and calling sinners out of their sin. But ultimately, Jesus was born to die.

We are supposed to be full of joy today as we celebrate one of the *BIGGEST* events in the Bible... God entering our story as Immanuel, the promised Messiah. 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. An event that results in the death of our beloved Messiah.

From the time we celebrate the Advent of the promised Messiah to the time we mourn his death on the cross is mere months apart for us. Moments it seems. This is 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, as prophesied in Genesis 3, the world will go dark again as we mourn his death. But Easter is coming, and that darkness will not last because it has *NO POWER* over light. After Jesus paid the price for our sin and defeated death once and for all, he ascended into heaven victorious, to the praise of all the angelic host, bringing light once again into a dark world. With Jesus' resurrection, God fulfilled another long-awaited promise of the Serpent Crusher!

This is what we celebrate at Christmas! YES! God entered his own story by sending Jesus, our Immanuel - God with us, but he is also the Serpent Crush and our Savior, "...the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." (John 1:29)

Today, as we participate in all of our holiday traditions, let's give them new meaning by bringing Jesus into them!

As we look around at all the beautiful, sparkly lights on houses and on our trees, 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, we are blown away by how good you are. You are worthy of all our praise and glory. As we enjoy all of the beautiful celebrations of Christmas today with family and friends, help us remember that Jesus, our Immanuel, is also our Sacrificial Lamb, the Good Shepherd, and our future King!*