



An Advent Devotional:

*Seeing Jesus Through the Eyes
of the Christmas Story Characters*



A Message for Parents/Devotional Readers

You know, it's funny. When we read Bible stories, we tend to view the characters as supernatural beings –heroes at the least and almost perfect people close to deities at the most. Neither is probably true. Oh sure, they accomplished heroic deeds and are worthy of admiration, but the truth is they were humans, just like us, with all our foibles and failures, fears, and worries. Maybe it's time to see them for who they really are and learn from their experiences.

In this devotional, we take you through the Christmas story through the eyes of the story's characters – from Mary and Joseph to the angels, shepherds, and rulers. Experience what it might have been like to witness firsthand the true Christmas miracle – Emmanuel, God With Us.

We want this to be a hands-on and very fun experience for everyone in the family, so we've included some ideas for family activities. Take your pick of a "theme" for the month and run with that:

1. Create an Advent tree – either use your general Christmas tree to add ornaments to, or make a separate, smaller (maybe tabletop) tree that is specifically set aside for these Advent devotionals. Each day, create (or select from a group you purchased) an ornament to hang on the tree that will remind everyone of the message and meaning. You can plan ahead with a look here at Ornament Ideas. Or download and print out these suggested ornaments that you can color and hang on your Advent tree at www.mymissioncc.com/advent
2. Build an Advent garland – each day write the key verse on a card and tie it to a rope. Hang it on your tree or in a prominent place in your seasonal decorations.
3. Create Christmas activity cards with a fun seasonal activity that you select each day during Advent. See the next page for some fun Christmas Ideas!

Finally, we've included ideas for you and your family to reach out to your neighborhood and community this holiday season to be the hands and feet of Jesus. We hope you find these ideas inspirational as you keep your family focused on the real reason for the season – Jesus. It is our hope and prayer that by reliving those precious moments, you will gain a fresh and deeper understanding of why Jesus became a little baby in a manger; and what that means for you today.

Family Seasonal Activities

The idea behind this activity is two-fold: to do something together as a family every day to celebrate the season (and hopefully create some treasured family memories), and more importantly, to have fun doing so!

Get a stack of index cards. Put Christmas decorations on one side and on the other, write out something you'd enjoy doing together as a family. Choose 25 activities from this list or come up with your own. You can number them in the order you plan ahead of time (to ensure the things that have specific dates mesh with your family schedule), or just do it ad-lib, picking whatever comes up and going with that. Make it fit your family's personality and schedule! It should be something you all look forward to, not something you just do out of obedience.

Food Related

1. Make hot cocoa
2. Bake Christmas cookies
3. Make popcorn balls
4. Sip apple cider
5. Build a gingerbread house
6. Make Christmas treats for a friend or neighbor

Shopping Related

1. Go Christmas shopping for Mom
2. Go Christmas shopping for Dad
3. Go shopping for a family or child in need (think Operation Christmas Child, Angel Tree or Adopt a Family)

Movie Related

1. Watch a Christmas movie
2. Watch A Charlie Brown Christmas
3. Watch the Polar Express

4. Watch The Grinch Who Stole Christmas
5. Watch the classic Christmas Story
6. Make it a fun movie night – Home Alone or the Santa Claus

Craft Related

1. Pick out a Christmas tree
2. Decorate the tree
3. Make Christmas ornaments
4. Make paper chains for your room
5. Cut-out paper snowflakes
6. Make a card for someone special
7. Make a card or gift for your teacher

Community-Related

1. Buy a gift for a child in need
2. Put together donations for a family in need
3. Visit Santa at the mall or your church
4. Write a letter to Santa
5. Visit the elderly in a nursing home or a sick neighbor or lonely friend

Reading Related

1. Read the Nativity Story
2. Read the Candy Maker's Gift
3. Read A Christmas Story

Seasonal Related

1. Play & sing along to Christmas Carols
2. Decorate your room for Christmas
3. Decorate your bedroom door for Christmas
4. Wrap Christmas presents
5. Attend a Christmas play or concert
6. Make a video sharing your favorite Christmas traditions
7. Mail Christmas cards
8. Color a Christmas picture
9. Do a Christmas puzzle
10. Put up your family's Christmas decorations
11. Go Christmas Caroling

Activity Related

1. Go ice skating
2. Build a snowman
3. Go look at Christmas lights
4. Build a snow fort

25 Days of Advent

Seeing Jesus Through the Eyes of the Christmas Story Characters

ADVENT DAY 1: Dec. 1 – Angel Gabriel, God’s Chosen Messenger

Devotional

Have you ever wondered what the angel who carried God’s message to the world thought about that task? Gabriel was the angel chosen by God to tell:

- Zechariah that he and his wife would have a son who would prepare the way for God
- Mary that she would mother Christ
- Joseph that he should not be offended by Mary’s pregnancy and marry her anyway
- The shepherds that their Savior was born and encourage them to tell the world
- Joseph again, to take his child, the son of God, to Egypt to avoid being slaughtered by a king

Those are challenging circumstances and very difficult messages! How can you convince someone well past their childbearing years that they will soon be a parent? What do you say to a young teenage girl who is cowering in your presence that she will become pregnant and bear a child even though she’s never been with a man? How do you convince a man that the woman who was promised to him was pregnant (not by him) and that he should accept her and the child as his own anyway?

Was the task difficult? Did he understand the weight of his message and the historical turning point that he ushered into the world of humans? Did he face battles along the way, spiritual warfare with the enemy who certainly did NOT want to see God’s son born to man?

In his book, *An Angel’s Story*, author Max Lucado assumes a fierce and ongoing battle in the spiritual realm. In the angel Gabriel’s view:

We knew we could not fail. But we had no idea that the battle would come so soon. Suddenly I was entangled in an invisible net. Row after row of angels tumbled in upon me. Even the final flank was moving too fast to avoid the trap. Within moments we were a ball of confusion: wings flapping against wings; angels bumping into angels.

According to the scenario Lucado envisions, that was the first of several spiritual battles between God’s army of angels and Satan’s cadre of demons before Gabriel even makes it to earth.

On a wave of worship, I flew, this time alone. I circled through the clouds and over the ground. Below me was the city where Mary was born. The Father was right; I knew her in an instant. Her heart had no shadow. Her soul was as pure as any I’ve seen.

I made the final descent. “Mary.” I kept my voice low so as not to startle her.

She turned but saw nothing. Then I realized I was invisible to her. I waved my wings before my body and incarnated. She covered her face at the light and shrank into the protection of the doorway.

“Don’t be afraid,” I urged.

The minute I spoke, she looked up toward the sky. Again I was amazed. I praised my Father for His wisdom. Her heart is so flawless, so willing. “Greetings. God be with you.”

Her eyes widened, and she turned as if to run. “Mary, you have nothing to fear. You have found favor with God. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call His name Jesus. He will be great. He will be called the Son of the Highest. The Lord God will give him the throne of His father David; He will rule Jacob’s house forever – no end, ever, to His kingdom.”

If I were Gabriel, I would have been thinking, “Are you kidding me Lord? They’ll never believe those messages.” And then, after carrying out his mission, apologizing to God for ever doubting Him. Gabriel finishes his assignment with Mary, makes sure she is willing, and leaves her as the Holy Spirit comes upon her, pleased he was able to do what God had entrusted to him and ready for his next assignment.

Look Up – Connect with God

Read: Luke 1:26-38

Key Verse: “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.’” (Luke 1:35)

Pray: Father God, thank you for Gabriel and his commitment to you. Thank you for Mary and her faith in you. Give us the determination and strength of Gabriel to accomplish what you call us to do. And give us the heart of Mary to be ready to obey no matter what you ask. May we be prepared for spiritual battle, and always remember to look up to you for help in our times of need.

Look In – Family Memories

Discuss: Share with your family any spiritual battles you’ve faced in the past and how you were able to overcome them. Talk about things that seem too big to handle and ask God to help you attack them one small step at a time.

Activity:

- Advent Tree: make or select an ornament of an angel and put it on the tree. [Download Ornaments](#) or [Ornament Ideas](#)
- Advent Garland: put the key verse on a paper/card, assign #1, and attach it to the garland twine. [Key Verses](#)
- Advent Cards: select a card and see what the activity might be (i.e., put up the Christmas decorations). [Family Activities](#)

Look Out – Connect with Others

Look into ministries and nonprofit organizations in your town; check out those your church may have a partnership with – see if they have any Christmas wishes for those they serve and decide as a family to meet one or more of those needs this Advent season.

ADVENT DAY 2: Dec. 2 – Mary, the Mother of Jesus

Devotional

As we celebrate this season looking through the eyes of all the characters of Christmas, there is none so unlikely to be at the center of this divine story as Mary. As a young, poor woman (guesstimates are she was around 14 or 15), she wasn't looking for prominence. She was simply living out an ordinary life in an ordinary town with unassuming dreams. She was all set to marry humbly, give birth to many children, and never travel far from home. She could be described as a nobody in a nothing town in the middle of nowhere.

Then, out of nowhere, this angelic being appears and tells her she had been chosen to bear the Son of God. Her initial response recorded in Luke was one of fear and confusion, and a little human skepticism. Several thousand years later we may think how cool to have an angel appear, but when Gabriel came to Mary, God had not spoken to his people or through his prophets for 400 years. And there are precious few moments recorded in Scripture when angels show up in person at all. So it's natural to think Mary was overcome with emotion – fear, doubt, confusion. She had never been with a man and the idea of becoming pregnant with the Son of God was overwhelming. I imagine her thinking, "Me, pregnant? With the Son of GOD? I'm just an ordinary girl, little more than a child myself."

And then there was the task she was being asked to bear. When Mary says, "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word," she was saying Yes to bearing the shame of an unwed pregnancy at a time when this carried incredible social stigma. Would her friends and family believe her claim that the baby came from the Holy Spirit? Heck, she wasn't sure she believed it. And what about Joseph? Would he stay with her or send her away? We know how the story ends, but she did not.

She was saying *Yes* to raising the Son of God. It's hard enough to be a parent to a human child; can you imagine the burden of raising Jesus? Would every maternal fear be magnified because He was God's son entrusted to her? When she fed Him and clothed Him and rocked Him to sleep, did she wonder what would become of this child sent to save the world? It would be staggering.

Mary was also saying *Yes* to a lifetime of roller-coaster emotions. She would see Jesus feed multitudes, raise people from the dead, and walk on water. But she'd also see Him mocked, taunted, and rejected even by His family and hometown friends. And being the good Jewish girl she was, she'd be aware of what would eventually come – her son unjustly put on trial by His own people, her people. Every parent's nightmare is to see their children suffer, and Mary would live this in the most agonizing way possible.

And yet...she still said *Yes*. Will you?

Mary didn't know everything. She didn't understand everything Gabriel told her. Mary, like all of us, was prone to doubt and worry and fear. But Mary did cling to what she knew. The child inside her womb was no ordinary child. He would save His people, including her. He would reverse sin's curse. This child would rule the nations.

Think you're insignificant living in the middle of nowhere? God knows your name. No matter what you've done or who you are, you can be made new in Him. Mary's story can be our story, if we just say *Yes* to Jesus.

Look Up – Connect with God

Read: Luke 1:26-38; Luke 1:46-49

Key Verse: “‘I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered. ‘May your word to me be fulfilled.’ Then the angel left her.” (Luke 1:38)

Pray: Father God, thank you for Mary's example. Thank you for her unwavering faith, especially in the difficult circumstances she had with the pregnancy, birth, and early years of Jesus. Give us that same faith and obedience to do whatever you ask of us, no matter how difficult or unbelievable it may seem. Help us to hear your voice. And during this Christmas season especially, help us to see through the eyes of those who witnessed your birth here on earth firsthand. Give us new insights into this Bible story. In Jesus' name.

Look In – Family Memories

Discuss: Was there ever a time in your walk with Christ when He asked you to do something that seemed impossible or improbable, something that would cause you to be shunned by your family or community, something that just flat-out stunned you and left you asking, “*What?*” Share that with your children and help them see how God walked you through that difficulty and provided for you when it seemed undoable. Consider playing “Mary Did You Know?” by Mark Lowry and talk about how the lyrics give insight to Mary's perspective.

Activity: Look through keepsakes and pictures, and share stories of your parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents!

- Advent Tree: make or select an ornament of a mother caring for a child (perhaps one of you and your children) and put it on the tree. [Download Ornaments](#) or [Ornament Ideas](#)
- Advent Garland: put the key verse on a paper/card, assign #2, and attach it to the garland twine. [Key Verses](#)
- Advent Cards: select a card and see what the activity might be (i.e., buy a gift for a child in need). [Family Activities](#)

Look Out – Connect with Others

Is there someone in your neighborhood, school, or family facing really tough times? Could you reach out just to encourage them, let them know you're there for them, and offer to pray for them? Check into organizations in your community that minister to young, unwed mothers and offer to volunteer or meet some specific need they have. Be the hands and feet of Jesus in your community to those hurting and in need.

You can download more of the devotional and the Christmas ornaments at **www.mymissioncc.com/advent**