



*On The Birth
of The King*

*Meditations on the Advent of
Christ Jesus*

*Prepared by the Pastoral Staff of
Trinity Presbyterian Church*

*"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."*

Luke 2: 10b- 11

The pastors of Trinity Presbyterian Church have written this collection of devotions for each day of Advent, December 1-25 as a gift to assist you in your preparations for the celebration of the birth of our Savior.

We hope the title of this series "*On The Birth of the King*" will prompt you to think of the meaning of Christmas as something that spans the ages, from the beginning of God's dealing with men even to the last day when He brings all His people to dwell with Him in His Kingdom.

As you see the lights on your tree and all the lights around your neighborhood push back the darkness, we hope you will remember that the "darkness always gives way to days of light in His presence!" (pg 1) The brightest of lights has come to bear in the dark night of the soul. He who "shined into the darkness" did so in order that you might find the true light which "gives light to every man coming into the world." (John 1:9)

But that's not where it ends. Jesus, meek and mild, born in a humble manner as a humble baby to a humble couple will not return in the same manner. Luke tells us He is a King, with a kingdom and a throne (pg 7). He will return to consummate His kingdom reign and to gather His Bride to Himself. And we, together with all the Host of Heaven, look forward to celebrating the Wedding Feast, with Christmas-like joy, for all eternity!

Your TPC pastors

Hymn: "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"
Trinity Hymnal p. 194

**Scripture
Reading**

**Isaiah
7:14**

*"Therefore, the
Lord himself
will give you a
sign: Behold the
virgin shall
conceive and
bear a Son,
and shall call
His name
Immanuel."*

Imagine a moment that you are a Jew living in Judah in the days of Isaiah. You love the Lord and desire to serve Him, but your heart is troubled. You've heard all sorts of rumors of political intrigue that swirl around King Ahaz - rumors of possible alliances he has made with a hostile, pagan nation called Assyria. You've also heard threats of war with Israel to the north. Then, with your own ears, you hear the great prophet Isaiah come to the king with an offer directly from God: "Trust in Me, and I will deliver Judah from all her enemies!" Yet, against all hope, this wicked king mocks God to His face and turns his back on God's offer of assured deliverance. With his sinful reply to the Living God, king Ahaz brings days of great darkness, not only on himself, but upon all Judah. The light of day seems to noticeably fade right before your eyes!

"Wait a minute! You don't want to talk of such dark things now! After all, what does darkness and destruction have to do with Advent?" It has everything to do with Advent! The King of Glory wrote Himself into this script. In fact, it's right in the midst of a most hopeless situation that God remembers His faithful remnant! It's to that remnant that God speaks in Isaiah 7:14. He calls them to look forward to a future king, one who is as different from Ahaz as night is from day; a future King who will have righteousness and faithfulness as His belt; a future King who will destroy the wicked with the sword of His mouth; a Stem from the Rod of Jesse who delights in the fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:1-5). How would they know this future Son of David? "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."

This is why true Israel looked forward to His coming and it's why we should look back to His Advent. It's also the reason to look forward to His second coming. Days of darkness always give way to days of light in His presence!

Saturday
December 2

Week 1

Hymn: "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus"
Trinity Hymnal p. 196

Scripture
Reading

Genesis
3:15

*"And I will
put enmity
between you
and the
woman, and
between your
seed and her
Seed; He
shall crush
your head
and you shall
bruise His
heel."*

Isaiah told us how God brings the light of hope into the darkest hour, thwarting the intents of sinful men. But this sort of undeserved intervention didn't begin in the days of Christ's birth. God's movement against the ravages of sin began even as the first attacks by the evil one had commenced. When there should have been immediate judgment upon Adam and Eve's sin, God instead promises grace through the work of their savior. Eve's Seed is Christ. How do we know that? Genesis 11 carefully traces the lineage of Abraham all the way back to Adam and Eve. Matthew 1 then traces Christ's ancestry back through King David all the way to Abraham. Do you see the connection? Jesus is the true Seed of Eve!

Where does this idea of "crushing" Satan's head come to fruition? At the cross! In the Bible, the word "head" can symbolize the seat of power for a nation (Isaiah 7:8) or one who represents those under his authority (Eph 1:22 and 5:23). Hence, when God speaks of crushing Satan's head, the Lord means to destroy Satan's power over this world. Jesus, in speaking of His death and resurrection said, "Now is the judgment of this world; now is the ruler of this world cast out. And if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself." (John 12:31-32) Of note as well, the word Golgatha means "skull hill."

Thus, as Christ is lifted up on the cross, His heel symbolically rest on the head of the great dragon, Satan himself. Hence the "skull crushing seed of Eve" (Gen 3:15) defeats the great enemy, so that you and I might be given liberty. Christ came into this world to die. But much more than that, Christ came into this world to conquer so that you and I might be set free!

Sunday,
December 3

Week 1

Hymn: "Rejoice ye Pure in Heart"
Trinity Hymnal p. 604

**Scripture
Reading**

**Luke
1:5-6**

"There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, ... His wife was of the daughters of Aaron and her name was Elizabeth. An they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly."

It can be very confusing when people say that the only righteousness of any value is the imputed righteousness of Christ. It is a blessed truth that our justification is grounded in the imputed righteousness of Christ alone. But sometimes people speak poorly of the righteousness lived out by believers, as if there were no such goodness that pleased God and which He blesses. But the experiential righteousness that the Holy Spirit produces in justified people is not considered as "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). In fact, experiential righteousness is an evidence that we truly are justified children of God.

Consider Zacharias and Elizabeth. Their righteousness was not "filthy rags" in the sight of God nor was Luke speaking of the imputed righteousness of Christ. Rather, here was a couple, who were justified by faith in the coming Messiah and on the basis of that faith, were living a life of habitual obedience to the Word of God! Further, through that same faith, both Zacharias and Elizabeth knew the on-going provision of God's forgiveness, cleansing, and restoration that the Lord provided for them right in the midst of His law.

Think of your own children. When my children do what I tell them to do and do it with a "happy spirit," I do not call that obedience "filthy rags" even if it is not exactly to my standard. God doesn't do this either. Rather, Hebrews 13:21 tells us that the Lord is "working in us that which is well pleasing in His sight."

Please note that I am not speaking of mere external conformity; Jesus soundly condemns all such faithless deeds. At the same time, our Heavenly Father is not difficult to please; He tells us His yoke is light! Yet, God's standard is high; He is hard to satisfy. All should love His affectionate "well done" while looking forward to the day when we will do so much better!

Monday,
December 4

Week 1

Hymn: "O Little Town of Bethlehem"
Trinity Hymnal p. 201

**Scripture
Reading**

**Luke
1:31 &
34-35**

*"And
behold, you
will conceive
in your womb
and bring
forth a Son,
and shall call
His name
Jesus.. Then
Mary said to
the angel,
'how can this
be, since I
have not
known a
man?' And
the angel
answered and
said to her,
'The Holy
Spirit will
come upon
you..therefore
that Holy
One born of
you will be
called the Son
of God."*

Have you ever considered why the virgin birth is important? There are 3 reasons that come to mind immediately. The virgin birth of Jesus is the typological apex of all the OT miracle births: In Genesis 21, an angel announces a coming child to a withered, barren, 90 year old woman named Sarah. In Genesis 30, Jacob's barren wife Rachael gives birth to Joseph. In Exodus 1, God delivers the baby Moses at his birth. In Judges 13, an angel tells Manoah's old and barren wife she is to bear a son named Samson. In I Samuel 1, God tells barren Hannah she is to bear a son whom she names Samuel. In Luke 1, Gabriel announces to Zecharias and barren Elizabeth of the birth of a son whom they name John (the Baptist). And finally Gabriel announces to Mary, a virgin, the greatest of all miraculous births, the birth of Jesus.

Second, the veracity of the Gospel is at stake. People will talk about Jesus' moral example but not about the miracle of His being born of a virgin. Yet if Matthew and Luke's discussions of this event are wrong, then all the NT is in question!

But most particularly to you and me, God cannot forgive your sin nor grant you everlasting life unless His Son was born of a virgin! Christ was born of a human, of our form, of our substance, subject to our pains and trials and even had to learn obedience to His Father (Heb 5:7-8). As a human, He was able to experience death (Isaiah 53:10) and He can justly represent all His people at the cross. As one conceived by the Holy Spirit, He also serves as your sinless substitute (Romans 5:15-19).

Yet Jesus is not just the son of Mary - He's the Son of God, infinite in His being. Only an infinite person could make an infinitely sufficient sacrifice to cover sin against an infinitely holy God. Only He could provide a sacrifice sufficient enough and lasting enough to turn away God's wrath forever (Heb 10:11-12 and 14)! You never need worry about His benefit running out.

Tuesday,
December 5

Week 1

Hymn: "What Child is This"
Trinity Hymnal p. 213

**Scripture
Reading**

Isaiah 11:10
"And in that
day there
shall be a
root of Jesse,
Who shall
stand as a
banner to the
people; for
the Gentiles
shall see
Him, and his
resting place
shall be
glorious."

Matthew
2:1-2 "Wise
men from the
East came to
Jerusalem
saying,
'Where is he
who has been
born King of
the Jews?'"

Who were the Magi? Daniel says they were the esteemed advisors to the king of Babylon. These "wise men" studied math, science, agriculture, history, astronomy and astrology. During Daniel's tenure in the court of Babylon, Daniel was trained as a magi. During his service to the king of Babylon, it was not the magi who opposed Daniel. In fact, there is good evidence that the magi respected Daniel because of his ability to interpret rightly the king's dreams. Further, they were Chaldeans (as was Abraham). How many came? Tradition says 3, but we don't know for sure; there may have been more! When did they come? Christ's family is living "in a house" and the star did not appear till Jesus' actual birth. It may have taken the magi as long as 2 years to get to Bethlehem. Further, the text ("child" in Mt 2:11) shows us Jesus was no longer an infant, but a weaned toddler! This explains why Herod killed all babies 2 years and under in Bethlehem; he had to cover all contingencies!

Why did they come? In Daniel 9:25, Daniel recorded what was coming! It is also of note that Gabriel, who gave this information to Daniel, is the same angel who spoke to Zecharias and to Mary.

This trip may have begun as curiosity or as a political issue, but Matthew 2:11 testifies to something more: They came to "worship Him." While testifying to the royalty of this baby, God is also fulfilling His promise made to another Chaldean named Abraham in Genesis 12:3. How fitting that He chose to work in the lives of those whose forebears were kind to Daniel and from the same region as father Abraham! These magi will come to see Jesus as much more than a mere prince among the Jews (They give kingly gifts to Jesus, not Herod)! Matthew also makes sure we see that they "bowed down" in their worship of Christ as king.

When Christ returns in all His might, as King of all creation, will He find you like the magi who acknowledge His lordship or like Herod, full of head knowledge, but with no saving grace in your heart?

Wednesday,
December 6

Week 1

**Hymn: “Of the Father’s Love Begotten”
Trinity Hymnal p. 162**

**Scripture
Reading**

Luke
1:26-27

“Now in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the House of David.”

Here is the most fundamental fact about Christmas and about the incarnation. It starts with *God*. It comes from *God*. An angel was sent *from God*. Christmas has no biblical meaning without God. It has an American meaning without God. It has a European meaning without God. I’ve seen where it even has an Iraqi meaning without God. But it doesn’t have a historically true meaning, or a biblical meaning without God.

Christmas is about the Creator of the universe, who is not Himself part of the universe, moving in the person of His Son, into the universe that He made. And what makes this fact even more remarkable is that this created universe—the personal part of it, the moral part of it—is in rebellion against its Maker, and yet He came into the universe that He made in order to save those who are in active rebellion against Him. One of the clearest statements of this truth, in all the Bible, is in 1 Timothy 1:15, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief.”

So Christmas is about something God initiated—something God did in history. It has to do with the way the created universe relates to the one Being who is absolute—no beginning, no ending, no development, no becoming—He simply is who He is. In fact, God says in Exodus 3:14 that His name is “I am who I am.” Christmas is about how this God reveals Himself to us and how we are commanded to relate to Him.

Thursday,
December 7

Week 1

Hymn: "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"
Trinity Hymnal p. 203

Scripture
Reading

Luke 1:
32-33

"He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

Who is He who came from God breaking into His universe? Luke tells us He is a King. Three words point to His kingship: "Throne," "Reign," and "Kingdom." What makes this controversial is that Americans like democracy, not kingdoms. Saudi Arabia is not an attractive system to us. The world is moving toward democracy; it's what we are fighting for in Iraq. Rule by a king is a more primitive form of government, isn't it? Democracies are more advanced, more developed, more suitable for the modern world. This is where history is going—democracy, not kingdom. Right?

The only reason that kingship is not attractive to us is because in this age, the only kings available are finite and sinful. Listen to C. S. Lewis: *"A great deal of democratic enthusiasm descends from the ideas of people like Rousseau, who believed in democracy because they thought mankind so wise and good that everyone deserved a share in the government. The danger of defending democracy on those grounds is that they're not true. . . I find that they're not true without looking further than myself. I don't deserve a share in governing a hen-roost, much less a nation. The real reason for democracy is that mankind is fallen; no man can be trusted with unchecked power over his fellows. Aristotle said that some people were only fit to be slaves yet I see no men fit to be masters."*

If there were a king who was not limited in wisdom, power, goodness and love for his subjects, then monarchy would be the best of all governments. If such a ruler could ever rise in the world—with no weakness, no sin—then no wise and humble person would ever want democracy again. And it means that your joy will be best served by submitting to his kingship.

Friday,
December 8

Week 2

**Hymn: “Good Christian Men, Rejoice”
Trinity Hymnal p. 207**

**Scripture
Reading**

**Matthew
1:20**

“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.”

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and then to shepherds with good news for the world (Luke 1:26-27; 2:10), was it good news to this teenage girl? Perhaps Mary was thinking: *How do I explain my pregnancy to my family? Will my fiancé Joseph call off the betrothal? What will the townspeople say? Even if my life is spared, how will I survive as a mother all alone?*

When Joseph learned about Mary’s pregnancy, he was troubled. He had three options. Go ahead with the marriage, divorce her publicly and allow her to be publicly scorned, or break off the engagement quietly. Joseph chose option three, but God intervened. He told Joseph in a dream, “Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:20).

For Mary and Joseph, Christmas began with submitting themselves to God in obedience despite what may have been huge emotional challenges before them. However, neither of them gave in to their emotions or any run-away fears. Rather, they entrusted themselves to God and in doing so demonstrated for us the promise of 1 John 2:5: “If anyone obeys His word, the love of God is truly made complete in them.”

May God’s love fill our hearts this Christmas season—and every day—as we walk before Him in faith filled obedience!

Fill my heart, Lord, with rejoicing at the gift of Your love and forgiveness found in Your Son Jesus.

Saturday
December 9

Week 2

Hymn: "Away in A Manger"
Trinity Hymnal p. 205

Scripture
Reading

Luke 2:
15-16

"Then 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." ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger"

A stable? What a place to give birth to the Messiah! The smells and sounds of a barnyard were our Savior's first human experience. Like other babies, He may even have cried at the sounds of the animals and the strangers parading around His temporary crib.

If so, they would have been the first of many tears. Jesus would come to know human loss and sorrow, the doubts His brothers and family had about Him, and the pain His mother experienced as she saw Him tortured and killed.

All these hardships—and so much more—awaited the baby trying to sleep that first night. Yet from His very first moments, Jesus was "God with us" (Matt. 1:23), and He knew what it meant to be human. This would continue for over three decades, ending at His death on the cross.

Because of His love for you and me, Jesus became fully human. And being human allows Him to identify with us and to justly represent us in His sacrifice. Never again can we say that no one understands us nor loves us; Jesus does!

May the Light that entered the world that night cast its brilliance into the deepest corners of our souls this Christmas, giving us the peace on Earth of which the angels spoke so long ago.

Father, help our hearts to know the love of Christ and to honor Him with our unyielding devotion in this and every season. We love You.

Hymn: "The First Noel"
Lyrics found on next page

Scripture
Reading

Ephesians
2:24

*"He Himself is
our peace, who
has made both
one, and has
broken down
the middle wall
of separation"*

On Christmas Eve 1914, during the First World War, the guns fell silent along a 30-mile stretch of the Western Front. Soldiers peered cautiously over the tops of trenches while a few emerged to repair their positions and bury the dead. As darkness fell, some German troops set out lanterns and sang Christmas carols. Men on the British side applauded and shouted greetings. The scene was reenacted in the 2005 movie *Joyeux Noel*.

The next day, German, French, and British troops met in no-man's land to shake hands, share food, and exchange gifts. It was a brief respite from war that soon ended when the artillery and machine guns roared to life again. But no one who experienced "The Christmas Truce," as it became known, would ever forget how it felt and how it fueled their longing for lasting peace.

In Isaiah's prophecy of the coming Messiah we read, "His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). By His death on the cross, Jesus removed the "no-man's land" between us and God. "For He Himself is our peace" (Eph. 2:14).

In Jesus we can find lasting peace with God and harmony with each other. This is the life-changing message of Christmas!

*Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!" —Wesley*

Only in Christ can true peace be realized!

The First Noel

The First Noel the angel did say
Was to certain poor shepherds
in fields as they lay;
In fields as they lay, keeping their sheep,
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
Born is the King of Israel.

They looked up and saw a star
Shining in the east beyond them far,
And to the earth it gave great light,
And so it continued both day and night.

And by the light of that same star
Three wise men came from country far;
To seek for a king was their intent,
And to follow the star wherever it went.

This star drew nigh to the northwest,
O'er Bethlehem it took its rest,
And there it did both stop and stay
Right over the place where Jesus lay.

Then entered in those wise men three
Full reverently upon their knee,
and offered there in His presence
Their gold, and myrrh, and frankincense.

Then let us all with one accord
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord;
That hath made heaven and earth of naught,
And with His blood mankind hath bought

Hymn: "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"
Trinity Hymnal p. 194

**Scripture
Reading**

Isaiah 7:10-
15

*"Behold, the
virgin shall
conceive and
bear a Son,
and shall call
His name
Immanuel"*

In the pages of Scripture, several baby-boy births stand out; all are considered to be miraculous. Seth, the firstborn after the murder of Abel and a child of promise. Isaac, the hope of Israel's future, born to one who was barren and too old to have a child. Samuel, the answer to a mother's fervent prayer, also born to one who was barren. And then John the Baptist, born to Elizabeth and Zacharias, both well past the years of child birth and never having any children previously. All are extremely important. All were joyously received. And all were described as being somewhat unexpected and different. In each case, we are told that the mother conceived and bore a son, even though it was unexpected or said to be impossible (Gen. 4:1; 21:2-3; 1 Sam. 1:20).

Now consider the birth of Jesus. The description of His arrival was even more greatly detailed in that it took place in response to God's ancient promise and it was brought about directly by His Spirit. Further, in Micah, we were told where He would be born—Bethlehem (5:2). In Isaiah, that His mother would be a virgin (7:14), and that He was coming to save people from their sin (ch.53).

In the New Testament, we were given even more key information as what His name would be and why (Matt. 1:21), where He was born in fulfillment of prophecy (2:6), and how both His birth mother and His adoptive father were part of God's plan (1:16).

What the Old Testament prophets predicted about the Redeemer, the New Testament says is fulfilled in Jesus Christ (CF Luke 24:44). Jesus' birth stands above all births and in serves as the fulfillment of all the OT miracle births. His coming changed the world and He can change your life!

*Mild He lays His glory by, Born that man no more may die.
Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth. —Wesley*

**Hymn: "Thou Who Wast Rich Beyond all Splendor"
Trinity Hymnal p. 230**

**Scripture
Reading**

**Hosea 11:1
& Matthew
2:13-15**

*"This was to
fulfill what the
Lord had
spoken by the
prophet, "Out
of Egypt I
called my
son.""*

One year when our family was gathering at my aunt June's home for Christmas dinner, we had a tornado warning issued right around noon only to have a storm roar through the northern part of Montgomery County a few moments later (such is the nature of the weather in Alabama!) Things changed very quickly in a very short span of time, so much so that we were fearful for our wellbeing on that Christmas day many years ago!

I mention that story to help us imagine what it was like for Joseph's family as he, Mary, and their young child traveled to Egypt. Herod, though not a tornado (but even more dangerous), threatened them as he sought to kill their little boy. Imagine how frightening it was for them, knowing that "Herod sought the young child to destroy Him" (Matt. 2:13).

We usually take a more idyllic view of Christmastime—lowing cattle and kneeling shepherds in a peaceful scene. But there was no peace for Jesus' family as they sought to escape Herod's horror. Only when an angel told them it was safe did the family go out of Egypt and back home to Nazareth (vv.20-23).

When we consider these sorts of circumstances that were a part of the incarnation of Jesus, it should put us in an attitude of awe! Jesus, who enjoyed the majesty of heaven in partnership with the Father, set it all aside to be born in poverty, to face many dangers not only during his birth and infancy, but most especially during His ministry. All this, while deliberately moving toward the cross in order to be crucified for us. Coming out of Egypt is one thing, but leaving heaven for us—that's the grand and amazing part of this story!

*Jesus our Savior left heaven above, Coming to earth as a Servant with love;
Laying aside all His glory He came, Bringing salvation through faith in His
name. —Hess*

Hymn: "Joy To The World"
Trinity Hymnal p. 195

Scripture
Reading

Luke 19:40

*"I tell you
that if these
should keep
silent, the
stones
would
immediately
cry out"*

Every year it seems that Christmas becomes more and more commercialized. Even in nations where the majority of people call themselves "Christian," the season has become more about shopping than worshiping. The pressure to buy gifts and plan elaborate parties makes it increasingly difficult to stay focused on the real meaning of the holiday—the birth of Jesus, God's only Son, the Savior of the world.

But every holiday we also hear the gospel coming from surprising places — the very places that so commercialize Christmas — shopping malls. When you hear "Joy to the World! The Lord is come; let earth receive her King" ringing from public address systems, you should think of the words Jesus said to the Pharisees who told Him to silence the crowds who were praising Him. Jesus said, "If these should keep quiet, the stones would immediately cry out" (Luke 19:40).

At Christmas we hear the stones cry out. Even people spiritually dead, sing carols written by Christians who have been physically dead for many years. And it all serves to remind us that no matter how hard people try to squelch the real message of Christmas, they will never completely succeed.

Despite the commercialism that threatens to muddle the message of Christ's birth, God will make His good news known as "far as the curse is found."

*No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found. —Watts*

Hymn: “Angels We have Heard on High ”
Trinity Hymnal p. 214

Scripture
Reading

Isaiah 9:2
and John 1:4

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined “ and ” In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

The great Dutch artist Rembrandt was known as the master of light and shadow, and his style of painting helped him immensely as a storyteller on canvas. As a true son of the Reformation, most of his paintings embedded a subtle but powerful biblical truth. Rembrandt’s painting *The Adoration of the Shepherds* portrays the darkened stable in Bethlehem where two shepherds kneel beside the manger while other people stand farther away. One man holds a lantern, but the brightest light shines not from his lantern but from the Christ-child, illuminating those who have gathered close to Him.

Seven centuries before Jesus’ birth, Isaiah used an image of light and shadow to foretell the coming of a Savior for Israel: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined. . . . For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given” (Isa. 9:2, 6).

Each person may see a different nuance in Rembrandt’s paintings, but perhaps each of us is represented somewhere in that stable. Are you kneeling in worship, standing back in hesitation, or hiding from the light that can penetrate your darkness?

Christmas invites us to step out of the shadows of darkness and allow the light of Christ to shine into our hearts.

*Observing God’s love from afar
Is only a passing delight;
But when we experience Christ’s presence,
Our darkness is turned into light. —Hess*

Hymn: “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen”
Trinity Hymnal p. 211

Scripture
Reading

Luke

1:46-48

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed ”

“Mary must have worried and fretted over this news from the angel: Why was God doing this to her? What would people think when she began to show? How would she tell Joseph? Her heart must have just died when Joseph told her he had decided to divorce her.” We are very quick to buy into an anxious line of thinking concerning Mary. We do so because we know how we would very likely respond to her situation. I can appreciate how someone would worry about God’s plan, especially when it entails a never before heard of event. But it’s important not to make unwarranted assumptions and read something into the text!

What does the Bible reveal about Mary’s mindset? Luke 1:26-29 tells us that Mary was “troubled” by Gabriel’s words and “ponders” the nature of his greeting. Immediately in verse 30, Gabriel tells Mary, “Do not be afraid because you have found favor with God.” *From this point on* and in relation to this event and her immediate future, there is no indication that Mary is troubled, worried, anxious, or afraid. In verse 34-35, Mary does ask Gabriel something about the mechanics of how she will bear a son, since she is a virgin. Gabriel simply tells her that the Holy Spirit will be the creative agent who will cause the conception to take place because *“nothing will be impossible with God.”*

For Mary, Gabriel’s direct and simple answer is enough! She sets her heart to believe what God has said to her through Gabriel, and she is determined to be content in His will for her life. “Great Heart” is on the scene in verse 38 when Mary says, *“let it be with me according to your word.”* That is what faith does; it chooses to find its rest in God’s word and in His will. Mary chooses to “consider” (cf. James 1:2) this situation as being from her Lord who loves her and intends His best for her. Please read her full response in vs. 46-55!

Mary’s godly response is one that takes practice. Our hearts will not go where hers went unless we choose worship as the best courses of action in the midst of trial. As hard as it might be on the front end, if you train yourself to praise and worship in the midst of trial, you will look back and say, “Wow, that’s just what I needed. Why did it take me so long to get there?”

Hymn: "Comfort, Comfort Ye My People"
Trinity Hymnal p. 197

**Scripture
Reading**
Luke 1:67-79

"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high"

If you were Zecharias, what would you have said or done if an angel announced to you that your infant son had been chosen by God to be the herald of the Messiah, and that he, in the spirit and power of Elijah, would be the greatest prophet ever born? How would you respond?

For nine long months, Zecharias had been unable to speak because he had questioned the angel's promise that God would give him a son. Finally his tongue is loosed, and what happens? He's filled with the Spirit and praises God!

The first thing that Zecharias wants to talk about is the Lord's mercy in salvation. The second thing that he's eager to announce is how God is doing in fulfilling a 2,000 year old promise. Then and only then does he tell everyone about his son's mission. And when he describes the role of his son, it's all about pointing to Jesus. These are three glorious parts of *The Benedictus*, of this song of blessing sung by Zecharias.

When you read Luke 1:76-79, it should amaze us at how the prophecy of Zecharias, given when his son was eight days old, charts precisely the content of John's life and preaching ministry. He will prepare Israel for the coming of the Lord...His coming in judgment and His coming with grace. John will call Israel to repentance; his first message will be to warn Israel against God's impending judgment, as he prepares the way of the Lord.

But then, he's also going to preach forgiveness of sins and the salvation that flows from the forgiveness of sins. Read Vs. 78ff. In other words, John's preaching of sin and repentance is going to be rooted in an understanding of God's grace and forgiveness through the work of Messiah!

Heavenly Father, Your grace is marvelous, but we can't see that until we see our own sin. Help us then, having seen our sin, to bless God even as Zecharias did, for the marvelous grace of our loving Lord. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hymn: "What Child is This"
Trinity Hymnal p. 213

Scripture
Reading

Matthew
1:18-25

"When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus."

Joseph is a largely forgotten player in the drama of the birth of Jesus Christ. Search the Christmas hymns; hardly a one mentions Joseph. Matthew, however, wants us to know about Joseph. It was through Joseph that the Lord Christ lay claim to the throne of David. And Matthew wants us to know of Joseph's spiritual goodness; in fact, Matthew calls our attention to it.

Here was a man of modest means. Luke 2:24 tells us that at the consecration of his baby son in the temple, Joseph offered a pair of young pigeons as his sacrifice, a sacrifice permitted in the law of Moses for those too poor to afford a lamb. God did not choose a rich man or an influential man, but a man of modest means and no reputation to be the father of the King of Kings.

Joseph was a carpenter. He must have died while Jesus was still a young man, for by the time the Lord's ministry began, Joseph was no longer on the scene. We don't know any more about him besides what Matthew tells us.

But what Matthew tells us about Joseph is important: Here was a righteous man who walked in obedience to the commandments of God. If you scan the first two chapters of Matthew you see this illustrated a number of times. Joseph obeyed the Lord's commands, however difficult, both un-questioningly, and unhesitatingly. He obeyed the angel and took the pregnant Mary home as his wife. In 2:13, he obeyed the angel and took his family to Egypt. In 2:19 he returned home in obedience to still another command.

Finally, Joseph also possessed a striking humility. He finds out about the coming of the Messiah long after his wife does, an arrangement for which he had not bargained. Yet, like Mary before him, he accepts it unconditionally as the will and calling of God. He marries and foregoes a sexual relationship with his wife for months, because he is ready to think that other considerations far outweigh his own pleasures and rights as a husband.

Lord, we thank you for the faithfulness of Joseph; strengthen us to walk in faithful obedience even as he did!

Hymn: "As With Gladness, Men of Old"
Trinity Hymnal p. 226

Scripture
Reading

Matthew
2:1-11

"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. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him."

In Numbers 24:17, Balaam the seer makes it very clear that the first part of his prophecy is in the distant future, "*I see him, but not now; I behold him but not near.*" It's also clear that this prophecy pertains to a person. And we even get an indication as to the identity of this person when he says that he sees "*a star out of Jacob and a scepter out of Israel.*" In **Vs. 19**, he tells us that "*One out of Jacob will have dominion.*"

Matthew records that magi from the East came to Israel looking for the King of the Jews, because they've seen His star. Matthew is telling you that the prophecy of Balaam was clearly understood by these Gentile magi, who then came looking for One who had been prophesied 1400 years earlier. God may have even used Daniel to explain all this to their ancestors when Daniel was in charge of all the magi in Babylon.

Is 60:1 - "*Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee*"

Of interesting note: in Josephus' **Dissertations**, he speaks of a star that stood over Jerusalem for a long period of time. He then he gives this unusual commentary, "*God has care for men and by all kinds of premonitory signs shows His people the way of salvation.*"

What may have begun as a political visit seems to have become something more as Matthew 2:2 and 11 testify: in both passages, the magi say that they have come to "*worship him.*" God has something more than mere political diplomacy in mind! While testifying to the royalty of this lowly born baby, God was also fulfilling His promise made to another Chaldean named Abraham: **Gen 17:6** - "*In thee, all the nations of the earth shall be blest.*"

Hymn: "Thou Who Wast Rich, Beyond All Spendor"
Trinity Hymnal p. 230

Scripture
Reading

Luke 2:1-7

"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."

Have you ever thought what an amazing thing it is that God ordained beforehand that the Messiah be born in Bethlehem (as the prophecy in Micah 5 shows); and that He so ordained things that when the time came, the Messiah's mother and legal father were living in Nazareth; and that in order to fulfill His word and bring two little people to Bethlehem that first Christmas, God put it in the heart of Caesar Augustus that all the Roman world should be enrolled each in his own town? As Proverbs 21:1 says: "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever he will."

He is a big God for little people.

Yet, you would think that if God so rules the world as to use an empire-wide census to bring Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, He surely could have seen to it that a room was available in the inn. But please understand, the "No Vacancy" signs over all the inns in Bethlehem were *for your sake*; "For *your* sake he became poor." The Calvary road begins with a "No Vacancy" sign in Bethlehem and ends with the spitting and scoffing and the cross in Jerusalem.

Yes, God could have seen to it that Jesus had a room at His birth. But that would have been a detour off the Calvary road.

Hymn: "Once in David's Royal City"
Trinity Hymnal p. 225

Scripture
Reading

Luke 1:30-
38

"And Mary
said to the
angel,
"How will
this be,
since I am a
virgin?"
³⁵ And the
angel
answered
her, "The
Holy Spirit
will come
upon you,
and the
power of the
Most High
will over-
shadow you;
therefore
the child to
be born will
be called
holy—the
Son of
God!"

As mentioned earlier, the virgin birth of Jesus is the typological apex of all the OT miracle births (many of which involved the annunciation of an angel). Why is this so important? First, the veracity of the Gospel is at stake. People will talk about Jesus' greatness and His example but not about His being born of a virgin or about His divinity. Yet if Matthew's and Luke's discussions of this event are wrong, then all the NT is in question!

Second, if the veracity of the NT is in question, then its answer to man's condition is also questionable. But most particularly, why is the truth of the virgin birth essential to your and my salvation? **God cannot forgive your sin nor grant you everlasting life unless His Son was born of a virgin!** He had to be born of our form, of our substance, subject to our pains and trials and even had to learn as a human how to be obedient to His Father (Heb 5:7-8). As a human, He was able to truly experience death.

And, like Adam, He can be a representative for all His people (Romans 5:15-19). He was like Adam before the fall - no sinful nature. Holy Spirit's operation guaranteed no sin in His conception nor any of the guilt of Adam's original sin. Thus He is a perfect representative of His elect people: He understands the power of temptation and the pain of human existence, but never has to deal with His own sin!

Yet, only an *infinite* person could make an *infinitely* sufficient sacrifice to cover sin against an *infinitely* holy God. Jesus is not just the son of Mary – He is the Son of God, the God/man, the divine person, infinite in His being. Only He could provide a sacrifice sufficient enough and lasting enough to turn away God's wrath forever (Heb 10:11-14)! Further, we never need worry that the benefit of Christ's sacrifice will run out (Heb 9:12)! Halleluiaah! What a Savior!

Hymn: "All Praise to Thee, Eternal Lord"
Trinity Hymnal p. 219

Scripture
Reading

Matthew
1:21-33

*"You shall
call his
name Jesus,
for he will
save his
people from
their sins."*

In Matthew 1:21, the angel says, *"You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."* The king of the universe is a savior, the righteous savior of sinners. All His holiness and all His power stand in the service of his saving mercy.

God broke into the universe to be a saving king!

Vs 33 says *"He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."* The King of the universe will never be replaced. His kingdom is forever. Therefore, your salvation and His protection are forever.

God broke into the universe to be a holy, divine, saving King forever.

The King has commissioned me on this 21st day of Advent, 2017, to declare publicly that there is an amnesty for all who have rejected His kingship up to now. Before He sat down on the throne of the universe, He died for our sins so that whoever would believe on Him might not perish but have eternal life. Whoever lays down the arms of rebellion and receives the forgiveness of the king and swears allegiance to Him as the holy, divine, saving King will live forever. In the name of King Jesus, come and receive this gift!

Hymn: "Hark, The Herald Angels Sing"
Trinity Hymnal p. 203

Scripture
Reading

John 1:9-13
"He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

Charles Dickens' novel, *A Christmas Carol*, was released on December 19, 1843, and has never been out of print. It tells the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, a wealthy, sour, stingy man who says, "Every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas,' on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding!" Yet, one Christmas Eve, Scrooge is radically changed into a generous and happy man. With great humor and insight, Dickens' book captures the universal longing for inner peace.

As a young man, the apostle Paul opposed Jesus and His followers with a vengeful spirit. He "made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison" (Acts 8:3). But one day he encountered the risen Christ, he was given new birth, his heart was changed, and his life became a different story (9:1-16).

In a letter to Timothy, his son in the faith, Paul described that life-changing event by saying, even though he was "a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man . . . the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 1:13-14).

Jesus was born into our world and gave His life so that we can be born again, forgiven and transformed through faith in Him. This is the heart of Christmas!

*Then let us all with one accord
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord,
That hath made heaven and earth of naught,
And with His blood mankind hath bought.*

Hymn: "Away in A Manger"
Trinity Hymnal p. 205

Scripture
Reading

Exodus
1:1-5

*"And the
angel of the
Lord
appeared to
him in a
flame of fire
out of the
midst of a
bush. He
looked, and
behold, the
bush was
burning, yet
it was not
consumed.
And Moses
said, "I will
turn aside
to see this
great sight,
why the
bush is not
burned."*

In December each year, people place trees in their homes with lights, reflective ornaments, and silver or gold tinsel all over those trees; hundreds of lights on each tree, reflecting and sparkling off bulbs, garland, and other beautiful surfaces. What have we made? A burning bush that is not consumed! A tree of light that points us to God speaking into the lives of His people Israel many thousands of years ago as He announced His plan to save them out of Egypt (Exodus 3:1-5); A menorah (also a burning bush) right out of the temple, meant to remind us of God's promise to be with His people.

Thus, when I see holiday lights, I get excited. I love it! I am reminded of the Light that makes Christmas a joy-filled occasion — a single Light so bright that it illuminates the whole world with truth, grace, and love. This Light — Jesus — is everything that the world is longing and looking for (Isa. 9:2,6-7). In fact, He has told His followers to display His light so that others will see and glorify God (Matt. 5:16).

Imagine if Christians worked as hard at shining and synchronizing the light of God's love as they do at working to illuminate their street with Christmas lights. Don't get me wrong; I truly enjoy Christmas lights, decorations, and all the festivities. But we can't forget the people still living in darkness; would that we were ever mindful to insure the true Christmas Light shined forth through us into the lives of others.

*O to be filled with His life divine;
O to be clothed with His power and might;
O to reflect my dear Savior sublime—
Always to shine as the saints in light!*

Hymn: "O Come, All Ye Faithful"
Trinity Hymnal p. 208

Scripture
Reading

Luke 2:
25-38

"Then he took Him in his arms and blessed God, saying, 'Now Lord, let thy servant depart in peace, according to your word. For my eyes have seen Your salvation which you prepared in the presence of all peoples.'"

In Luke's account of the Christmas story, it seems that only two persons in all of Jerusalem - Simeon and Anna, both old and discounted by the leadership at the Temple - seem to grasp the mysterious nature of what God has set in motion. "This Child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against," Simeon told Mary, and then he made the prediction that a sword would pierce her own soul (2:34-35). Similarly, when Anna saw Jesus, she immediately began to cry out her thanksgiving to God in that He was fulfilling His promise to bring redemption to Jerusalem (37-38).

Simeon and Anna knew that though on the surface little had changed—Herod still ruled, Roman troops still occupied Israel—but both had "eyes to see and ears to hear" what God was doing behind the scenes. They knew.....underneath, everything had changed; God's promised redemption had arrived!

What an example of faith filled patience; believing in and looking for the fulfillment of the promises of God with eager expectation. Living as if the arrival of Messiah was imminent, just around the corner. The Bible calls us to do the same: Paul prays for the believers in Philippi that their love for each other would "abound more and more in real knowledge and depth of insight, so that you might approve the things that are excellent, in order to be pure and blameless *until the day of Christ.*" They are to live in light of the imminent "*day of Christ*", the day of His return. Oh that the "day of Christ" would animate our hearts as the first day of Christ appearing did for Simeon and Anna!

Hymn: "Angels, from the Realms of Glory"
Trinity Hymnal p. 218

Scripture
Reading
John 1:4-18

*"But as many
as received
him, to them
He gave the
right to
become
children of
god, even to
those who
believed in
His name,
who were
born, not of
blood, nor of
the will of the
flesh, nor of
the will of
man, but of
God."*

John 1:4-18 is his rendition of the Incarnation. It's not a historical narrative, but rather a testimony as to the impact of the Creator coming into the world, into time, into human life itself, to disclose to mankind the glory and the grace of God. Have you ever noticed that the Lord's name is never mentioned and won't be until Vs 17? John forces you to think about the identity of his subject. He is identified at the outset as the Word, and then we have pronouns, "He" and "Him." He is referred to as the Light. John the Baptist testifies of Him. But still, we have not learned who it is precisely that John is talking about. It's a brilliant rhetorical device to lay emphasis on the identity of the One about whom such fabulous things have been said.

While John thunders to us of the deity of Christ in vs 1-5, in Vs 14 he also makes sure you know that the Word became a real man, taking on living flesh, which in turn "*made His tabernacle among us.*" For anyone familiar with the OT, the phrase would immediately call to mind the tent that Moses made where God met with Israel before the Temple was built. God told Moses in Exodus 25:8, "*have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.*" The implication of this way of speaking is unmistakable. God has chosen to dwell among His people as He has before, but this time He comes in human flesh!

What's the effect of all this? John wants us to see that we become rich as a consequence of Jesus' incarnation; the Word who was with God and who was God and who was made flesh gives to all who received Him the right to become children of God (vs 12).

That's what Christmas means. It's the privilege of being adopted into this extraordinary family that stretches across time and space, a family of believers who have been brought out of darkness, not by the will of man, but by the will of God, into communion with Christ, so that we can call God our Father. What glory! What blessedness! This is Christmas!

