



O HOLY NIGHT

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We've seen it in the lives of people all over the world. When people encounter the living God in His Word, everything changes. Eyes are opened. Hungry hearts are filled with truth. Lives are transformed. Families are reconciled. Entire communities are challenged to see the world through a different lens—the lens of Scripture.

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Since 1976, Walk Thru the Bible has helped people overcome obstacles to knowing and living God's Word. Our innovative live events and high-quality biblical resources inspire passion for God's Word

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Every day, God is using Walk Thru the Bible to share His Word around the world. We serve the **biblically unengaged**, the **persecuted church**, **under-resourced pastors and Bible teachers**, and **children**—from India to Honduras, from Kenya to Moldova, from the UK to Venezuela, and the U.S. and Canada, we ignite passion for God's Word.

Every year, that's millions of people we impact with God's Word, for now and eternity. And every day, we offer God's truth to a broken world with this certainty:

The Bible changes everything.





O HOLY NIGHT

DAY I

CONTEMPLATE

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.”

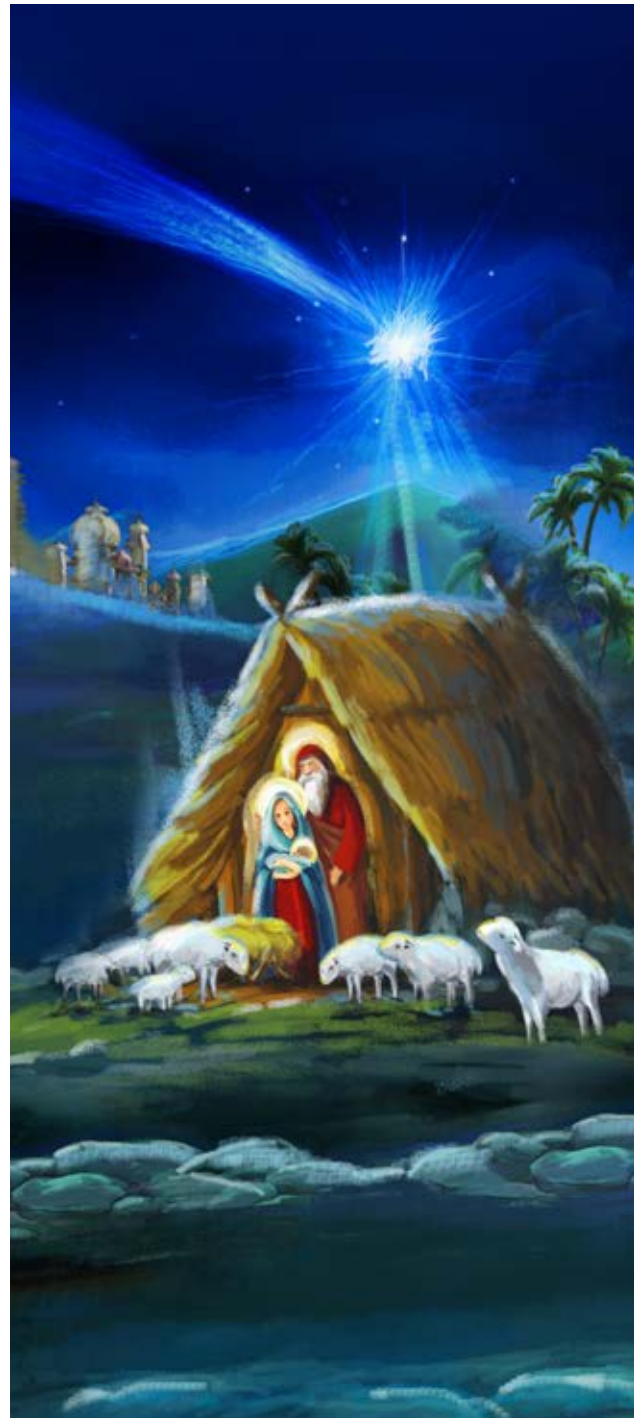
– *Micah 5:2*

When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

“‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of
Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who
will shepherd my people Israel.’”

– *Matthew 2:3-6*

Read: Matthew 1 and 2



DAY 2

JESUS, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Matthew 5:17

IN WORD When we think of the Christmas story, we usually think of the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke. These explain how Jesus came into this world. But why did Jesus come? He answers that Himself in many of His teachings. One of the answers is given in Matthew 5:17.

We don’t often think of this verse in terms of the Advent. To us, it is more often a confusing statement about legalism and the role of the law in a Christian’s life. But there is much more to it than that. The Law and the Prophets are the Word of God—immutable and inviolable. The law that Moses received at Sinai cannot be broken without catastrophic consequences. The prophets cannot be ignored without the same results. Yet the law was broken and the prophets ignored it repeatedly. Only by man fulfilling them can man be saved. How could God accomplish our salvation in light of our numerous willful violations? He sent a Man.

Jesus fulfilled all righteousness. When He went to John to be baptized, it was not for His own need. It was a baptism on Israel’s behalf—and, by extension, ours. “It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness,” He said (Matthew 3:15). He accomplished what we could not: true obedience and true repentance on our behalf.

IN DEED Jesus did not come to tell us “never mind” about the law. That’s not a basis for God’s forgiveness, though we often presume that it is. God has never just ignored our offenses. Humanity could not be saved without a law fulfiller. That’s why Jesus came. He paid attention not only to every small letter and stroke of the pen, but also to the Spirit behind them. In so doing, He accomplished what we could not—righteousness. And then He gave it to us.

That’s the reason for Christmas. The baby in the manger was our only hope to fulfill God’s law. Thank God He did.

Scan here to watch this week’s message from Phil Tuttle, President & CEO of Walk Thru the Bible.



Read: Matthew 5:17-20

“O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel.”
Latin hymn

DAY 3

JESUS, OUR PEACE

“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”
Matthew 10:34

IN WORD Isaiah prophesied about the coming “Prince of Peace” (9:6). The angels declared peace on earth in Luke 2:14 as they announced the coming Lord. But Jesus had a different declaration. He will be the source of division on earth. People will fight about the truth of His words. They will draw swords against each other in heated conflict over His claims. The fact of His cross and resurrection would become history’s greatest scandal. When persecution comes, friends and family members will turn each other in. And when judgment comes, He will be the dividing line by which families and nations are split.

Was His prophecy true? History bears it out. There is no more controversial figure in the entire human race than Jesus. He has been blessed as God incarnate and cursed as a man-made delusion. He has changed countless lives even while “scholars” have disputed whether He ever existed.

No, the kind of peace the world seeks is harmony on this planet. Jesus made it clear that His peace is of a different order. It reconciles God with His traitorous creatures and humanity with its holy God. It puts a new Spirit in a once-conflicted heart. It is a peace within and a peace from above, but it is not universal peace among our race. Many hate Him. It will always be so. Such is the rebellion of man.

IN DEED Who would have thought that the infant in Bethlehem would be so scandalous? But the enemy knew it in the Garden, Herod saw it in the star, and Pilate heard it from the mobs. No one could make such kingly claims without controversy, even when demonstrating their truth. The pride of the human heart will bow to no Lord, especially One who reveals its sin. The Prince of Peace? Absolutely. But not the kind the world expects. Our peace is deeper and better—and it lasts forever.

Read: Matthew 10:34-36

“O hush the noise, ye men of strife, and hear the angels sing.”
Edmund Sears

DAY 4

JESUS, OUR LOVE

"I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me." John 6:38

IN WORD Why did Jesus come? Why did the Creator decide to clothe Himself in creation and enter this world through a young girl late one night in the company of livestock? We know the answer, of course. The Bible is very clear: Jesus came to save us. But His incisive declaration in John 6:38 should tell us something about the will of God. It is good. Jesus defines it for us: "This is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day" (v. 39).

For everyone who has ever wondered how God sees him or her; for everyone who has ever doubted God's love when a prayer has gone unanswered or a life has become broken; for everyone who has cried out to God, "Are You there?" or "Do You care?" Jesus has this answer: He has come to do God's will, and His will is very, very good.

The goodwill of God is a natural, theological belief for those who hold to 1 John 4:8—"God is love." But as a practical belief, we often fall far short of affirming this. Causing us to doubt God's love is one of the enemy's most frequent points of attack and one of the flesh's most devastating points of corruption. In fact, everything but the Bible itself sometimes seems arrayed against this belief: circumstances, moods, relationships, and the harsh words and deeds of other people. Nevertheless, it is true. Hold out for it. The Bible promises that if we will only believe, God's will toward us is a cause for celebration, not despair.

IN DEED Jesus came into this world as an act of divine love, not vengeance. When we're suspicious of His agenda, we need to remember: There is nothing of judgment in His work until He comes again. So relax. We need no clearer illustration. He is here by God's will, and it is God's will and great pleasure to love us.

Read: John 6:35-40

"Love came down at Christmas."
Christina G. Rossetti

DAY 5

JESUS, OUR TRUTH

"You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth." John 18:37

IN WORD Jesus was an enigma. He came into the world as the child of a working-class family from a notably un-noteworthy region of the country. He amazed people with His teaching and His miracles, but He always defied their expectations. When they expected Him to act like a king, He wouldn't. No one could get a handle on exactly who He was.

The same is true for us today. The God-man, the Creator incarnate, defies our expectations as well. We pray to Him as our King, but He often leads us in the way of true humility. Then we follow Him as a human example, but He often insists on His kingly authority in our lives. He is not just our teacher, but our Lord. And He is not just our God, but our friend. The enigma of Galilee remains enigmatic today, even as we pray to Him. But what an enigma! He simultaneously fulfills our deepest needs for human fulfillment and for intimacy with the holy. He is exactly the answer to everything we didn't know we wanted.

IN DEED Jesus said He came into the world to testify to the truth. This is what Christmas is all about. Think about it—infinite truth in a finite body! It is an answer to all of those questions the philosophers have asked for centuries: Why are we here? Who made us? Where are we going? In Jesus, God pulled back the curtain on divine mysteries and made them visible. Not completely understood, of course, but tangible at least. He opened the window on all that has been going on behind the scenes in this drama we call life. We can see the divine in something as mundane as human history. An enigma? Yes. But a blessed revelation, too. The Incarnation gave us truth—in person.

Read: John 18:36-37

"The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight."

Phillips Brooks

DAY 6

JESUS, OUR TEACHER

"Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."
Mark 1:38

IN WORD We like the idea of our own private Jesus. We celebrate the Bethlehem miracle as our own personal advent—not just Immanuel, God with us, "but "God with me, personally." It is not wrong to understand Jesus this way; He is the Savior not only of the world but of us as individuals. But it is wrong to understand Jesus only this way. And while we would readily admit that Jesus is for everyone who believes, we often act as if He is strictly a personal matter—relevant to ourselves, marginal to others. Jesus reminds us that He is not in an "us against them" relationship. He is always reaching out.

Jesus is the gospel. And the gospel did not remain in Bethlehem. He did not remain in Galilee. And He did not remain in Israel, even during His earthly lifetime. Over time, Jesus did not remain within the Roman Empire. Today, He continues to spread into the far reaches of the world. The gospel does not sit still. There are always other villages, and Jesus always seeks them out. That is why He came.

IN DEED Do you see the teaching of Jesus as universal property? We certainly accept its universal application as a theological tenet. But is that global focus part of our own outlook? It needs to be. The Jesus who dwells in our hearts does not sit still, and if we are sensitive to Him, He will not let us sit still either. Whether He takes us to the other villages is not the point; the question is whether we are responsive to Him when He says that's where He wants to go. Like the disciples, we are probably aware that "everyone is looking" for Him (v. 37). Like them, are we willing to accept His reply? It may surprise us that He did not respond by welcoming those who were looking for Him. But Jesus is always aware of the many, many sheep in this world who have no shepherd. Are you? After all, this is what Christmas is all about.

Read: Mark 1:35-39

"... dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart."
Charles Wesley



DAY 7

REFLECTION

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.

Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny
From depths of hell Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid thou our sad divisions cease,
And be for us our King of Peace.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.



*Originally written in Latin, circa 12th century. Translated by J.M. Neale, Hymns Ancient and Modern (1851) Stanzas 1-3.
Additional stanza (#4) translated by H.S. Coffin (1961).*



DAY 8

CONTEMPLATE

MARY'S SONG

And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit
rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been
mindful of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me
blessed, for the Mighty One has done great
things for me—holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in
their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their
thrones but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things but
has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel, remembering
to be merciful to Abraham and his
descendants forever, just as he promised
our ancestors.”

– *Luke 1:46-55*

Read: Luke 1



DAY 9

GOD'S REMEDY

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. John 1:14

IN WORD What was in the mind of God when He sent His Son to earth, to be born like the rest of us, to live with us? Was it frustration over all of His failed attempts to get people to behave correctly? Was it because the Law did not do what it was supposed to do? Was the spoken Word so lacking that, in a last-ditch effort, God tried turning the spoken Word into the living Word?

We know, of course, that the Incarnation was not a last-ditch effort. It was the plan from the beginning. All of the prior judgments—of Noah's contemporaries, of Sodom and Gomorrah, of degenerate Canaanite tribes—were foundational to this incarnation, to Jesus coming to earth and being born of a virgin. All of the prior promises—to Abraham and his descendants, to the newly freed Israelites at Sinai, to the prophets of restoration and hope—were wrapped up in this plan. The righteousness of God first had to be established, then the depravity of man. Then the plan would work. The wisdom of God, the "logos" and logic of the universe, the Spirit of the Eternal could clothe Himself in humanity and have it actually mean something.

What does it mean to you? When you read your Bible, does it make a difference that the Word is not just telling you what to do, but offering to re-create the fundamental nature of your spirit? When you worship God, is it better to do so with a transformed heart than with a slavish obedience to an unknown deity? Does it matter to you that instead of simply being religious as best you can, you relate to a Person—a Person who lived in the same kind of body you have and yet is still powerful and wise enough to be your God? Are you glad your faith is this . . . well, personal?

IN DEED Some people are not. They would prefer a distant God who will leave them alone until requested to show up. The God who became flesh has so much better in store for us. Yes, sometimes it feels a little too personal—there's sin and disobedience to deal with. But ultimately, we appreciate it. We're flesh and we need to relate to flesh. The Word knew that, so Jesus came to dwell. This is what Christmas is all about.

Scan here to watch this week's message from Phil Tuttle, President & CEO of Walk Thru the Bible.



Read: John 1:1-14

"Christ became what we are that He might make us what He is."

Athanasius of Alexandria

DAY 10

GOD'S TIMING

When the time had fully come, God sent his Son. Galatians 4:4

IN WORD Good plans require patience; they cannot be done hastily. When it comes to our salvation and God's will for our lives, we would like to push the Eternal to act a little more quickly. We may wonder why He waited millennia before the Messiah came. We may also wonder why He waits years before saving us from a difficult situation, or even saving our souls from eternal death. The answer in every case of God's timing is the same: preparation.

We don't know exactly why centuries of dry judgment prevailed before grace rained freely on all. We don't know why some cultures remain in nearly complete darkness today. We don't know why the chosen people's history required such long periods of disobedience, apostasy, and then judgment. And we don't know why God doesn't solve every problem the moment we pray, or why our Savior waits with veiled grace sometimes before opening our eyes to it. Perhaps the human race needed to exhaust its resources before God's offer of providence became meaningful. Perhaps the world had to be subjected to utter frustration before it could even accept a Savior. Perhaps so do we.

What we do know, however, is that God is thorough. His plans are lengthy but well-conceived. His artistry is slow, but His colors are rich. His layers of meaning are many, and His purposes are completely pure. We can trust His timing.

IN DEED The patience of the eternal God and the temperament of impulsive human beings often stand in stark contrast. A thousand years are as a day to the Lord, but not to us. We're much too impatient for that. We think God's plan for future generations might unnecessarily leave current generations shortchanged. We think a full revelation of His gospel was essential the first day after Eden.

But in His plan, a nation was cultivated, a law was given, human nature was exposed, prophets spoke, and creation waited. Then the Savior came. We were prepared for salvation, and we now celebrate the fullness of time. This is what Christmas is about.

Read: Galatians 4:4-7

"The coming of Jesus into the world is the most stupendous event in human history."

Malcolm Muggeridge

DAY II

GOD'S PURPOSE

For what the law was powerless to do ... God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. Romans 8:3

IN WORD Have you ever really pondered the meaning of Christmas? Was it just God's attempt to give us a good example to show us the way to live? Was it simply the birth of a great teacher? Did that innocent little bundle of flesh and blood in the feeding trough really hold the answer for us all?

We can never fully understand the depths of all of God's mysteries, but we can understand a lot. He has revealed His purposes to us, so we know why Jesus was sent to this broken planet. As much as our proud society hates the idea of an atoning sacrifice, Jesus was sent into this world to die. Like the cattle around Him, the baby of Bethlehem was born for slaughter. He bore the brunt of a fallen world so we could escape its tragic direction. He descended deep so we could ascend high. He gave us the way out of the horrible implications of our rebellion.

God demonstrated for centuries that the human condition could not be fixed by humans. It could not even be repaired by an external work of God. No, there had to be a sacrifice to pay the price; there had to be a person to live the life; and it had to be perfect on both counts. Only God could do that. He clothed Himself in flesh to die, He was raised to live, and He put His Spirit within us. He doesn't just give us life; He is our life.

IN DEED Long ago, we were created in the image of God. We didn't know exactly what that meant; the image shattered and we weren't able to see clearly. But in Jesus, we now see the Spirit of God dwelling in the image of God, and we know: We were made for glory. The glory we see in Jesus is offered to us freely—in Him. The earthen vessels that once walked with God in the Garden are now filled with the very God who made them.

Christmas is our assurance: Jesus came in our likeness to die our death, and He came in God's likeness to live our life. In Him, the image of God and the image of man meet. And now He lets them meet in us.

Read: Romans 8:1-4

"Christmas is the day that holds all time together."

Fulton John Sheen

DAY 12

GOD'S WISDOM

...Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 1 Corinthians 1:24

IN WORD Contemplating the Incarnation can teach us much about the wisdom of God. In the plan of the ages, the plan that cultivated a nation and sent a Messiah into its culture, God demonstrated His patience, His thoroughness, His righteousness, His mercy, and His love. He did not opt for expediency. He was not rash. His anger was pure and His holiness relentless. There were no depths to which He would not go for His love. There were no limits to His grace. There were no enemies that could thwart His intentions or sway His heart. He let us know what He is like.

The biblical purpose of God's wisdom is never simply to display it. Though it is beautiful and awe inspiring, it is not just a show for His glory. It is to be emulated. We are to become wise like Him, drinking our fill of His plan and knowing intimately His ways. If He is patient, we are to be patient. If His anger is pure, our anger is to be pure. If His holiness is relentless, so must ours be. In His righteousness, His mercy, His love, His peace and calm, His passions and purposes, and His thorough approach to separating and conforming a people to Himself, we are to find our calling. The wisdom of God is not just for our admiration; it is for us. We are to internalize it.

IN DEED Do you appreciate the wisdom of God? There is always a need to contemplate it more deeply. It is unsearchable, yet we must continue to search it. We will never exhaust its lessons, but we have to try. The wisdom of God created us, had mercy on us, and redeemed us. The wisdom of God built the universe we live in. It is not just an extra benefit to knowing Him; it is the Architect's plan that preceded our world and our lives.

We try to get wisdom by reading and asking God to speak to us. Let His wisdom speak more deeply. Consider the Incarnation, consider the meaning of Christmas, consider this "God with us" plan. Meditate on His ways and contemplate His eternal plan. You will find yourself beginning to think like Him. There is no greater source of wisdom than that.

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

"His wisdom's vast, and knows no bounds, a deep where all our thoughts are drowned."

Isaac Watts

DAY 13

OUR KIND OF SAVIOR

Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. Matthew 1:5-6

IN WORD They seem boring, these long genealogies. And even though the lineage of Jesus is extremely special, it still isn't the highlight of our Bible reading. We know He's traceable to Abraham, but that should matter only to a first-century Jew, not to a twenty-first-century Christian, right?

But a closer look is revealing. In Jesus' genealogy is Rahab, a woman of questionable morals who helped the Hebrew spies as they entered the Promised Land. And a generation later, the Moabite Ruth appears. Then, within two generations, an adulterous king with a murderous bent shows up. What are a Canaanite prostitute, a Moabite outsider, and a law-breaking king doing in Jesus' genealogy? Pointing to the hope we have in Christ, that's what.

Think about it: Jesus—the incarnate God, the invisible Creator appearing in the flesh—is a descendant of sinners. If Jesus could come from the seed of a prostitute, a foreigner, and an adulterer, He's just the One to represent sinners to God. While sinless Himself, the holy Son of God came in the form of fallen flesh, a descendant of sinful humanity in need of salvation. That kind of God-man could represent us well. In Him we can hope.

IN DEED We forget, with all of Jesus' holiness and perfection, the fallenness of the world He entered. He didn't take on Garden of Eden flesh; He took on the flesh that was forced out of the Garden to till the stubborn soil. He took on the flesh that killed prophets and seduced God's people, the flesh of circumcised rebels, foreigners, and outcasts. He took on the flesh of all of us.

That's why Christmas is so astounding. God didn't just become man; He became man in the form of those who had fallen—miserably. Only that kind of Savior can give us hope. His descent to save is greater than we thought. And our salvation is greater than we imagined.

Read: Matthew 1:1-17

"You could more easily catch a hurricane in a shrimp net than you can understand the wild, relentless, passionate, uncompromising, pursuing love of God made present in the manger."

Brennan Manning



DAY 14

REFLECTION

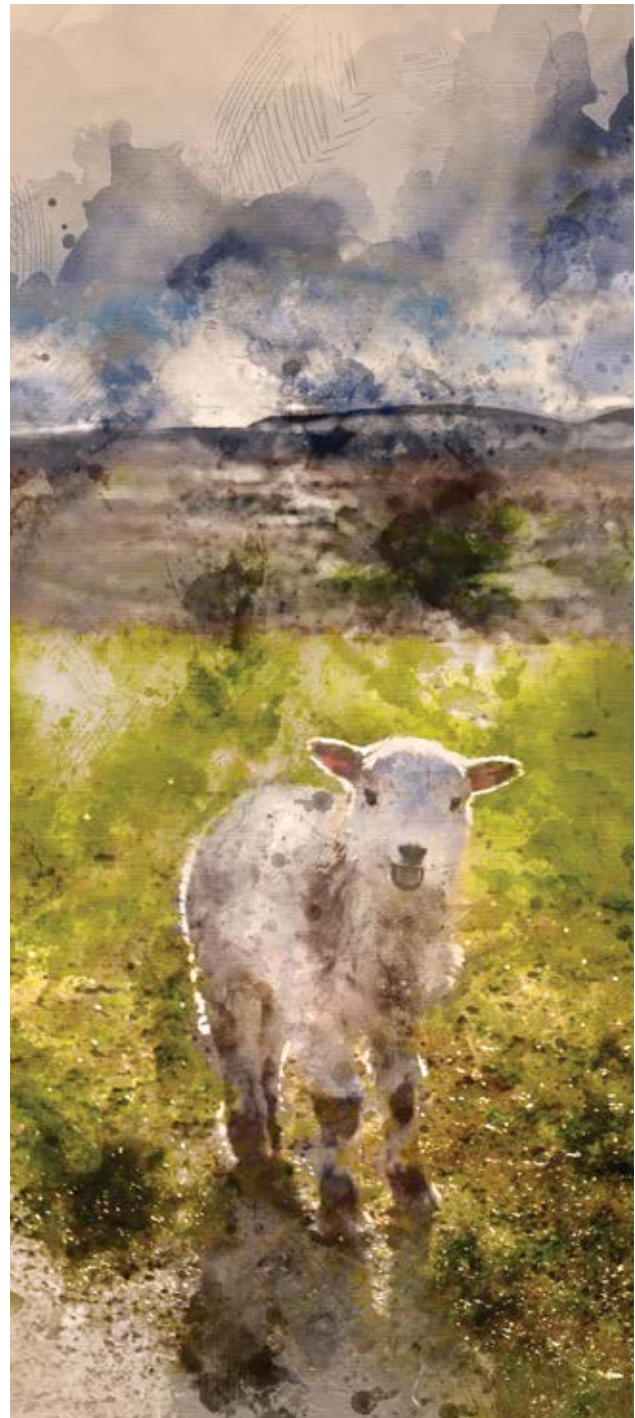
COME, THOU LONG EXPECTED JESUS

Come, Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts along;
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

Charles Wesley, 1707-1788





DAY 15

CONTEMPLATE

“Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.

For as in the day of Midian’s defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

Every warrior’s boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.”

— *Isaiah 9:1-7*



DAY 16

THE MYSTERY OF CHRISTMAS

To us a child is born . . . and he will be called . . . Mighty God. Isaiah 9:6

IN WORD Think of how amazing that is. A son—a tiny little baby—will be called Everlasting Father. A child will be called Mighty God. And on the surface, that’s absurd. Titles of deity and eternal fatherhood are reserved for God Himself, not for babies.

But the absurdity of Isaiah’s prophecy came true a few centuries later when a child was born, grew up, and actually lived up to those expectations. Many people who encountered Him simply could not envision Him as an ordinary human, or even a human at all. Others couldn’t tolerate those who called Him divine. He was unclassifiable, as all once-in-a-lifetime phenomena are. Uniqueness precludes categories, and people have argued about Jesus’ identity ever since He visited us. But Isaiah had it right, years before Jesus came: A child would be called things that only God can be called. People who argue that Jesus isn’t God need to go back a few centuries to a Jewish prophet and take up their case with him. A human being would be given divine names, he said, and to this point in world history, Jesus is the only One who has ever truly qualified for them.

That’s what’s so amazing about Christmas. It isn’t just that a Spirit became man—lots of religions talk about incarnations of spiritual beings—but that the uncreated entered creation, the eternal entered the temporal, and the infinite entered finitude. That which was completely “other” to human thinking expressed Himself in what was familiar to us. It’s a case of two different realities merging right before our eyes, and it still stretches our vision.

IN DEED Christmas is a mystery. It doesn’t matter how many familiar carols we sing, gifts we give, or traditional dinners we eat. A long time ago, infinite deity and fragile flesh met, and it rocked our world. It still does, and that’s okay. Let it. That’s what Christmas should be all about.

Read: Isaiah 9:6-7

Scan here to watch this week’s message from Phil Tuttle, President & CEO of Walk Thru the Bible.



*“I need this annual angel visitation . . . to know
the virgin conceives and God is with us.”*

Eugene Peterson

DAY 17

OPENING TREASURES

They saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures. Matthew 2:11

IN WORD It's a familiar scene, isn't it? We've seen and heard it practically every year in nativity plays, television specials, and our favorite Christmas carols. Wise men—three, we're often told, but the Bible doesn't say how many—came from a great distance to see the new King, and when they saw Him, they gave Him gifts. Pretty pricey stuff, too. Gold, incense, and myrrh—things that shine brightly, smell nice, and feel wonderful. Gifts that only kings can afford.

Perhaps this act of giving doesn't resonate with us like it should. Maybe we've heard it so often that our familiarity with it has bred, if not contempt, at least a lack of fascination. Perhaps we assume that right magi under the patronage of their kings could easily afford such treasures. To them it could have been nothing more than a routine baby-shower gift, as far as we know. But the important thing to notice in this passage is that the wise men gave to Jesus the things they considered most valuable. In a Middle Eastern culture two thousand years ago, these gifts were top of the line. It took them a lot of time and a lot of treasure to make that journey and present these gifts. It was an act of adoration.

IN DEED Such giving ought to characterize our adoration too. We praise God with our tongues, raise our hands to Him, and study His Word. But do we give Him what is most costly to us? Do we take the things we have that are top of the line—our treasures that we value most highly—and offer them to Him? Answering that is a challenge. We have to know ourselves well.

Think of what you value most. It may not be your time on Sunday mornings or your 10 percent tithe. Maybe it's a relationship, a dream, an honor, or an allegiance. Whatever it is, it's your treasure. Lay it at His feet and tell Him it's His. True love always involves deep sacrifice. It certainly did for Him. It does for us as well.

Read: Matthew 2:1-12

"As they offered gifts most rare, at the manger rude and bare, ... all our costliest treasures bring, Christ, to Thee our heav'nly King."

William Dix

DAY 18

THE HIGH COST OF WORSHIP

When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious. Matthew 2:16

IN WORD Why did our sovereign, omniscient God allow the tragic events surrounding Jesus' birth? The slaughter of Bethlehem's sons is particularly disturbing. The King of kings had entered this world, and a jealous local ruler had caught wind of it when Magi showed up in Jerusalem with a desire to worship the new King. Herod's prophecy experts pointed to Bethlehem as the place of His birth. The scheme to eliminate his "competition" failed when God warned the Magi not to cooperate. In his rage, Herod slaughtered a whole town's male toddlers and newborns. All Bethlehem weiled.

Jesus "flew in" under Satan's radar. God's enemy missed his chance to kill the dreaded "seed" prophesied way back in Genesis 3:15. His rage flared, and the sound of "Rachel weeping for her children" (Matthew 2:18) filled Bethlehem's skies. And if we think about it, we want to ask one simple question: Why?

Why did God allow Herod to be tipped off to Christ's birth? Why did the Magi enter Jerusalem with so little discretion about their purpose? God spend much of Matthew's first chapters warning people in dreams. Why did He warn the Magi to avoid Herod altogether? Or even to stay home? Their gifts cost painfully more than their asking price. Why did Rachel's babies have to lie dead in the streets?

IN DEED Because of worship, at least in part. It was important for representatives of the nations to visit the King and bow before Him. It tells us Jesus is more than a Jewish Messiah. He's the Savior of all who come, even from the far reaches of this world. Even Herod's rage—and Satan's—has become a witness to Jesus' identity. Was that witness worth the cost? We believe in an ancient, Middle Eastern Messiah because of such testimonies. They have given us life. And Rachel's children now know: Their lives were lost that worship of the Child might happen—then and even now. Yes, it cost a lot. And yes, it was worth it.

Read: Matthew 2

"Once the most holy Child of salvation gently and lowly lived below; now as our glorious mighty Redeemer, see Him victorious o'er each foe."

Mary MacDonald

DAY 19

TREASURE IN A MANGER?

"This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Luke 2:12

IN WORD Christmas is one of the best times of the year to express devotion, and yet devotion is so much easier on other days. Why is that? Perhaps because habits are easier to perform on routine days, and Christmas day—the whole Christmas season—is anything but routine. It's a celebration. Depending on your household, it may be a noisy celebration or a quiet one, a crowded one or a lonely one. But regardless of the noise level and the people around you, it is a special day. One of the most special of the year.

Why? What's so special about an arbitrary winter's day that may or may not be close on the calendar to the time of Jesus' real birth? After all, it's the event that we celebrate, not the day itself. But oh, what an event! It was a once-in-eternity occasion where God clothed Himself in our form and lived among us. Our ancestors saw Him first as a carpenter's boy, then as a precocious teenager, then as a powerful teacher and gifted communicator. Only a few saw what billions would later accept: That this was no ordinary human. He was fully human, yes; but He was—and is—so much more. In an intimate setting in Bethlehem, God got intimately close to His fallen creation. Instead of turning His back on our fallenness, He embraced our need. Our lives have never been the same, nor will they ever be again. Thank God.

IN DEED Look at that baby in the crude manger. His mother's blood has just been wiped from His face. She will one day have to wipe His blood from hers, but forget that for now. See Him in this humble scene, obscured by a dark night in an out-of-the-way town. You have pinned all your hopes on this fragile child. All of them. You have trusted Him with all of your fears and all of your treasures. You have made Him your life, and if He doesn't come through—if He proves to be just a long-ago baby in a faraway land—you have no hope. But He always comes through. He has never disappointed us, and He never will. He is Jesus, Lord at His birth.

Read: Luke 2:8-12

*"Love's pure light; radiant beams from Thy holy face, with the dawn
of redeeming grace."*

Joseph Mohr

DAY 20

UNLIKELY VESSELS

“He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!” Luke 1:32-33

IN WORD Mary knew the angel’s words pointed to a landmark event, but she couldn’t have comprehended how significant that event would be. The eternal Word was planted into human flesh to become everything the first Adam was meant to be—and more. Another genesis was breaking into this world through her own body. This time God wouldn’t breathe into dust to create mortal flesh; He would breathe into flesh to create immortal beings who, appearing like all others, were nonetheless unlike anything before. The new creation was planted within her, and the world would never be the same.

Gabriel did at least tell her that she was carrying a King within her. The everlasting throne promised to David long ago would be given to the life growing in her womb. All those questions the scribes and teachers had debated—How was it that the scepter that was never to depart from David had seemed to depart centuries earlier? And how could a promise of God prove untrue?—were now being resolved in the womb of an unknown peasant girl. God had accomplished greatness through a shepherd-turned-king centuries earlier, and now that king’s reign was being fulfilled in an even more inconspicuous vessel.

IN DEED That should be a profound encouragement to all inconspicuous vessels—jars of clay or earth pots, as Paul would later refer to us. Like Mary, we contain treasure. We are outwardly mortal in a Kingdom that the mortal cannot inherit. But inwardly, we are heirs forever, inextinguishable by mere death. Planted as earthly seeds, we grow into heavenly beings—not just long-lasting but incorruptible—and bring heaven to earth through our lives. Live as Mary, fully aware that a Messiah is within you. The eternal Kingdom is forming in your midst.

Read: Luke 1:26-38

“God became man to turn creatures into sons . . . to produce a new kind of man.”

C.S. Lewis



DAY 21

REFLECTION

HARK THE GLAD SOUND

Hark the glad sound! The Savior comes,
The Savior promised long;
Let ev'ry heart prepare a throne,
And ev'ry voice a song.

He comes the pris'ners to release
In Satan's bondage held,
The gates of brass before Him burst,
The iron fetters yield.

He comes the broken heart to bind,
The bleeding soul to cure,
And with the treasures of His grace
To enrich the humble poor.

Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace,
Thy welcome shall proclaim,
And heav'ns eternal arches ring
With Thy beloved name.

Philip Doddridge, 1702-1751



O HOLY NIGHT

DAY 22

CONTEMPLATE

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

—Matthew 1:18-25



DAY 23

NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE

"Nothing will be impossible with God." Luke 1:37, ESV

IN WORD Unlike Zechariah, who only verses earlier questioned the angel's word, Mary doesn't ask how she can know if it's true. She simply asks how it could possibly happen. That's fair; faith doesn't mean having no curiosity about the mechanism of supernatural events. And Mary has a lot at stake in this process; she has been sexually pure and wants to remain that way for her fiancé. This mysterious pregnancy could have harrowing implications.

Gabriel answers her simply. God's own Spirit will accomplish it; her conception will require no physical activity, no human intervention to make it happen. God only needs to speak in order for something to come to pass. No word of God can fail. Nothing is impossible with Him. When He says something, it's inevitable.

Think about that. It's true not only for Mary and a miraculous conception. It's true for anything God has spoken. All those words about your role in the Kingdom and the inheritance you will receive? Inevitable. All those promises about His presence and His power at work within you? Unshakable. Every comforting and encouraging word about how He will defend, guide, protect, heal, strengthen, deliver, and restore you? Certain. And those assurances that He will answer your prayers and fulfill His purposes for you? Guaranteed. Nothing He has spoken can prove untrue.

Yes, there are conditions to some of those promises, but He has made them clear. They are not onerous. The burden is not on us to live up to our end of the bargain. He takes the fulfillment upon Himself. He offers His faithfulness.

IN DEED That's good news. We aren't always faithful, but He is. It's His Word on the line, and He will live up to it. When He makes a promise, He will do everything necessary to accomplish it. No matter what we face in life, we can be assured of His faithfulness to His words. Nothing is impossible with God.

Scan here to watch this week's message from Phil Tuttle, President & CEO of Walk Thru the Bible.



Read: Luke 1:26-38

"I believe the promises of God enough to venture an eternity on them."

Isaac Watts

DAY 24

FOLLOWING HIS LEAD

Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." Luke 1:38

IN WORD Sometimes we come to God with a plan, our own agenda. We want the dream in our hearts to be fulfilled, so we ask Him if He will endorse it and bring it to pass. We petition Him for something that came from our own thoughts. We might say, "not my will but Yours," and we may even mean it; but we still hope He accomplishes our will.

There's nothing wrong with that. David did it with his idea for a temple, and God said yes, though He delayed it until the next generation. And whenever we have a deep need or an urgent situation, it's natural to call out to Him for help. He encourages that. But when He is the one with the plan—when He comes with His agenda and presents it to us—that's when we know for certain He is working through us and on our behalf. We are always on solid ground when we follow His lead.

That's where Mary found herself. This wasn't her idea. How could it be? Only the mind of God could have come up with this plan, and He didn't plant it within her before He announced it to her. But she responded with an attitude that should mark us for life. She declared her loyalty in service to Him and simply asked that His word to her be fulfilled. She put herself completely at His disposal.

IN DEED To most of the world, that looks like powerlessness. To those who know God, it's where true power comes from. When He initiates and we say yes, He accomplishes great things in supernatural strength. He opens doors and makes the impossible possible. He accomplishes more through one compliant servant than He does through a hundred reluctant ones with a companion agenda. We are never in a greater position of power than when we ask that His will come true through us just as He has said.

Look for opportunities to say that. Ask Him what He wants to do, look for His answer, and join in. The Kingdom comes in power through those who open up to whatever He wants to do.

Read: Luke 1:26-38

*"If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great
for me to make for Him."*

C.T. Studd

DAY 25

THE ANSWER

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” Luke 2:14, NIV

IN WORD The announcement of the Kingdom is good news. The King’s advent into this world may be traumatic—it certainly requires a response—but it’s the best thing that could possibly happen for the human race. And when heavenly messengers declared it, they gave Him glory and declared peace for His people. It was more than the embellishment of praise; it was a blessing for us to accept, agree with, and live in.

Peace. Shalom. That fullness of life we’ve been longing for. The abundance of overflowing goodness. The wholeness and healing and restoration we need. That sense that everything in my corner of the world is okay, all is well, life is as it should be. We crave that state of being constantly, and even experience it in brief moments. But the angels said it’s ours. It’s a gift for those on whom His favor rests, for those with whom He is pleased.

That’s what the coming of Jesus means to us. Later, a voice from heaven would tell us to listen to Him, but that’s a response that comes after we know who He is. First, the heavenly message gives us the simplicity of good news. Jesus did not come with a list of demands. He did not come with grievances or judgments or more hoops to jump through. The King did not come in this world to tell us to do a better job of measuring up. He came to say this: The shalom you’ve been looking for is here.

IN DEED Do you believe that? Not many people do, even among “believers” who claim to believe it. Christianity has become for many a burden, as if the Spirit puts more on our shoulders rather than setting us free. But the Good News of the Kingdom was heralded among overworked and overlooked shepherds in fields as an answer for their longings. And if we really understand the heart of God, we’ll receive it in exactly the same way.

What do you long for? Somewhere at the root of that desire is a true, deep, God-given question, and the answer is thoroughly given in the One who came. His favor is here. Your truest longings can be fulfilled. His peace is given to you.

Read: Luke 2:1-20

“God is the great reality. . . . His promises are real and glorious, beyond our wildest dreams.”

J.B. Phillips

DAY 26

ENVISION MORE

"I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!" Luke 2:30-32

IN WORD Simeon had been eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come. God had even given him a promise that he would see the Messiah before he died. In an age alleged to have no prophets, the Spirit had given to Simeon a very prophetic sign. And when the time came, the Spirit moved him to go to the Temple. We don't know how he recognized Jesus as the Promised One, but clearly the Spirit was guiding him. And when he saw Jesus, he uttered a prophecy and a testimony that caused even Jesus' parents to marvel.

Yes, this infant was not only the heir to David's throne, not only the glory of God's people Israel, as Mary had been told. He was also a light for all nations—even the Gentiles within and beyond Israel's borders. In an age of Roman occupation, this was a remarkable thought. But psalmists had hinted at it, and Isaiah had prophesied it directly. Even the Temple in ancient Israel had drawn Gentile nations to God's presence, and a reluctant prophet named Jonah had shown God's mercy to a foreign nation in darkness. Surely this Child's mission would extend further than the realm of Israel's people. God must have a bigger agenda than expected.

He does. He always does. Whatever we envision of His work and how He might carry it out, the end result is probably bigger than we thought. He begins with small things, but He doesn't ever end with them. His vision is greater than we can comprehend.

IN DEED Learn to cultivate greater vision. Wherever your vision is now, it's certainly smaller than what God wants to do through you. His plans may not be flashy or impressive to the world or even the church, but they will have far greater influence than you expected. His mission is comprehensive, and you are part of it. Learn to envision big.

Read: Luke 2:22-35

"Only he who can see the invisible can do the impossible." – Frank Gaines

THE PROPHETIC ENIGMA: THE FULFILLMENT OF THE AGES

The Messiah had been prophesied for centuries. But on the surface, the prophecies were patchwork, a confusing array of diverse predictions. Prophetic “calculators”—the Scripture experts—couldn’t quite add them up. The best they could do was watch and wait.

Hindsight has helped us; we would have been just as confused. We would not have known what to make of seemingly contradictory facts: Messiah would be from Bethlehem and from Egypt. He would be the seed of the woman and the Son of God. He would be David’s descendant and David’s Lord. He would reign and He would suffer. Yes, the prophecies of the Reconciler were hard to reconcile.

But at the appointed time, Jesus came, born of a virgin. Son of Man and Son of God. Born in Bethlehem (a lowly place), sojourning in Egypt (a sinful place), and settling in Nazareth (a despised place). A suffering Servant, a King in humble disguise. A Branch (Isaiah 11:1) and a Root (Isaiah 11:10). Worshiped by kings and despised by men. Dying, yet eternal. Any way you look at it, our Messiah was a walking, talking bundle of paradoxes.

It is often calculated that the odds of one person fulfilling all the messianic prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures are one in some astronomical number. I’d suggest that the odds of fulfilling these particular prophecies are even more astronomical. These aren’t your run-of-the-mill prophecies (not that there is such a thing). These appear deeply conflicted—not just extremely unlikely for more than one person to fulfill, but impossible for anyone to fulfill. Ever.

These foretastes of salvation come from a diverse range of prophets and poets and



THE PROPHETIC ENIGMA: THE FULFILLMENT OF THE AGES

scribes, from various Hebrew cultures across vastly different ages. They speak of life and death and suffering and joy and birth and betrayal and the power of the almighty God. They promise unimaginable glory and offer an unimaginable kingdom. They address every need of a human heart. But the one thing they don't do is paint a simple picture.

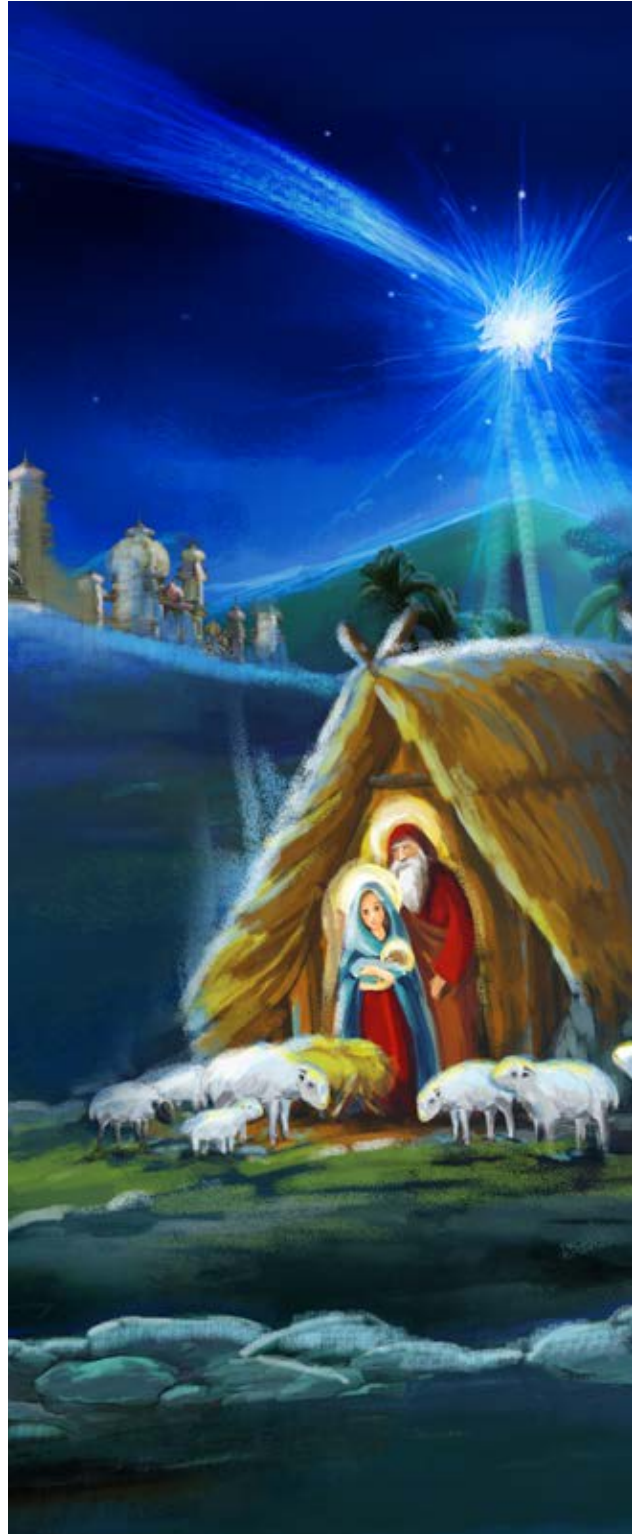
After all, no one can be from Bethlehem and Egypt and from a despised, separate place like Nazareth. No one can be from the seed of the woman and be divine. No one can be a baby and "God with us." No one can be the son of Abraham and the Father of Abraham, or the son of David and the Lord of David. No one can die and live. Can he?

But Yeshua the Messiah did.

The impossible became real, not just in prophecy, but in every aspect of Jesus' ministry. When Jesus stepped into this fallen world, "impossible" lost all relevance. It just doesn't apply anymore. Paradoxes can be resolved, enigmas can make sense, and sinners can be saved. The blind can see, the captives can be released, the lame can walk, and dry bones can get up and dance.

Jesus came not only at the appointed time, but also with an appointed, prophesied meaning. Everything is made complete in Him. So, whatever hopes you have this Christmas season—whatever enigmas riddle your life while the rest of the world celebrates a holiday—remove the stamp of "impossible" from them. And hundreds of fulfilled prophecies will bear witness to your faith.

by Chris Tiegreen. ©2021 by Walk Thru the Bible.





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