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The One Year Devotions with Jesus: Advent Sampler

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DAY 1

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation.

COLOSSIANS 1:15

To begin the Advent season, it's only natural to start at the beginning.

No, not at Jesus' birth. That's not even close. To find Jesus' beginning, you'd have to go back way further than that.

In fact, if you were in a time machine going backward through history, you'd have to zoom past the Bethlehem manger. You'd have to leave Daniel, David, Moses, and Abraham in your stardust. And when you finally reached the creation of the universe in Genesis 1, guess what? You'd have to fill up the fuel tank (time travel requires premium unleaded) and keep on truckin' backward into eternity past.

Ultimately, though, your mission would fail. That's because Jesus had no beginning. He has always existed. In other words, Jesus was alive before Mary gave birth to him in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago in ancient Palestine.

Whoa. Talk about a brainteaser.

WHAT'S IT MEAN?

How can someone be alive before they are born as a baby?

For humans, it's impossible. Our lives begin in our mothers' wombs, we live seventy to eighty years on average, and then we die.

But not Jesus. Because he is fully God, Jesus is eternal and all-powerful. He has always existed, and his power is limitless. Today's verse says Jesus existed "before anything was created."

Jesus is not a created being. He never had a beginning. He has existed for all time with God the Father and God's Spirit, the other two persons of the Holy Trinity. If you were drawing a time line for Jesus' existence, it would not have starting or ending points. The line would go forever in both directions!

This is difficult to understand. Our human brains can only process so much, and eternity is a tough concept. But Jesus is eternal because of who he is.

This is important to believe, because if Jesus was created, he would be limited in his power, like us. But he's not. He is fully God and all-powerful. And he's worthy of all our worship!

NOW WHAT?

Ask the oldest person in your family (probably a grandparent or great-grandparent) to share stories about what life was like when he or she was your age. Then remember that Jesus is infinitely older!

DID YOU KNOW?

The period before Jesus came to earth as a baby is called his "pre-incarnate state." Incarnate means to be flesh and blood like humans. So pre-incarnate means the time before Jesus became flesh and blood.



DAY 2

God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe. The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command.

HEBREWS 1:2-3

So if Jesus has existed forever (yesterday's devotion), what was he doing all that time before being born in Bethlehem? Since he's all-powerful and all-knowing, did he spend his days . . .

- beating every video game ever invented?
- playing golf on Pluto?
- helping the angels with their math homework?

Doubtful.

Here's what we know: at some point in eternity past, Jesus was actively involved with God the Father in creating the universe. When Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," Jesus was right there too!

Colossians 1:16 affirms this when it says, "Everything was created through him [Jesus] and for him." And Hebrews 1:2 says, "Through the Son he [God] created the universe."

Since Creation, Jesus has also kept the universe running smoothly. Hebrews 1:3 says, "He sustains everything by the mighty power of his command." And Colossians 1:17 says, "He holds all creation together."

It's by Jesus' infinite power that the earth revolves around the sun, planets remain safely in their orbits, and stars twinkle in the nighttime sky. Amazing!

We also know that before coming to earth, Jesus enjoyed wonderful fellowship with God the Father (John 17:24) and shared God's glory (John 17:5). Otherwise, the Bible is mostly silent on Jesus' existence before he came to earth.

WHAT'S IT MEAN?

Why doesn't the Bible tell us more about pre-Bethlehem Jesus? That's a mystery. But we know enough. The Bible provides everything God wants us to know about his Son. As 2 Timothy 3:15 says, "The holy Scriptures . . . have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus."

Through God's Word, we know that Jesus is our eternal Creator, our loving Savior, and our almighty King. He made us and he holds the entire universe together with just his words. That's incredible, praiseworthy power!

NOW WHAT?

Spend time making something special: build a house out of LEGOs, do a craft, or bake some cookies with your mom. Whatever you make, you need supplies or ingredients to create it, right? Now consider how Jesus created the entire universe out of nothing at all. Wow!

DID YOU KNOW?

The sun is one of Earth's closest celestial neighbors, and yet NASA estimates that it is 93 million miles away. This should start to give you an idea of how big Jesus' universe is and how powerful he is!



DAY 3

Then the disciples worshiped him. “You really are the Son of God!” they exclaimed.

MATTHEW 14:33

One of the most popular titles for Jesus in Scripture is “Son of God.” Jesus claimed it, the disciples believed it, the apostle Paul proclaimed it, a pagan Roman centurion at the crucifixion admitted it, demons acknowledged it, and God the Father affirmed it.

There’s no denying that Jesus is the Son of God. But this presents us with another doozy of a brainteaser: If Jesus is God, how can he also be the Son of God? Which is it? Is he God or God’s Son?

Well, actually, he’s both.

WHAT’S IT MEAN?

Like I said, it’s a doozy. But it’s a question worth answering.

When Scripture refers to Jesus as “the Son of God,” it’s a title that is always meant to highlight Jesus’ deity, not to imply that he is God’s child. As discussed earlier in this book, Jesus is God. He is not a created being. He is equal to God the Father in divinity and has always existed.

Jesus is called the “Son of God” not because he is God’s child, but because he is perfectly like the Father in all his attributes: holiness, power, wisdom, eternity, etc. The title “Son of God” also means that Jesus became obedient to the Father, willingly taking the role of a servant in coming to earth. There are lots of verses in the Gospel of John that discuss this, such as John 5:19; 8:28; 10:18; 12:49; 14:24; and 15:10.

Like a human son obeys and submits to his father, Jesus gladly submitted to God’s ultimate plan for humanity. When we as humans sinfully rebelled against God, instead of punishing us (as he had every right to do), God sent his Son—the Second Person of the Trinity—to accomplish his great rescue plan. Jesus willingly left heaven’s glory to become a man and pay the price

for our wickedness. It would cost Jesus his life. But it would provide new life for us.

The Son of God is truly worthy of all our praise!

NOW WHAT?

To learn more about Jesus' divine sonship, read Hebrews 1–2.

DID YOU KNOW?

Even some of Jesus' fiercest opponents, the Jewish religious leaders, acknowledged that his claim to be God's Son was really a declaration that he was God. That's why they wanted to kill him for blasphemy, or bringing disrespect (in their minds) to God (John 5:18; 10:33; and 19:7).



DAY 4

There is no sin in him.

I JOHN 3:5

On June 12, 1880, J. Lee Richmond made history. The slender, five-foot-ten left-hander from Sheffield, Ohio, pitched Major League Baseball's first perfect game, leading the Worcester (MA) Ruby Legs to a 1–0 win over the Cleveland Blues.

To earn a perfect game, a pitcher must record a victory in a game of at least nine innings in which he does not allow a single hitter from the opposing team to reach base.

The “perfecto,” as it’s called, is one of baseball’s rarest feats. From 1869, the start of professional baseball, through 2014, there have only been 23 perfect games recorded—an average of one every 6.3 years.

Only once has a perfect game occurred in the playoffs—New York Yankees legend Don Larsen’s famous 2–0 win over the Brooklyn Dodgers in Game 5 of the 1956 World Series.

Being perfect as a pitcher is tough. But being perfect as a human is impossible. It simply can’t be done. Every human is born into sin. We have inherited Adam’s sinful nature (Romans 5:12).

Jesus, though, is different. Jesus’ miraculous birth kept him from human corruption.

WHAT’S IT MEAN?

The Bible says Jesus experienced a virgin birth (Matthew 1:18-25). In other words, Mary didn’t become pregnant with Jesus the normal human way. Having previously existed as the eternal Son of God, Jesus entered Mary’s womb through a miracle of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:35).

This is one of the greatest, most mysterious wonders of the Bible. But it’s critical that we believe it. Because of Jesus’ virgin birth, he didn’t inherit a sinful nature like regular humans. As today’s verse and many others like it

proclaim, Jesus never sinned. His holiness uniquely qualified him—and only him—to pay the penalty for sins that we deserved (Hebrews 9:14).

Jesus threw a perfect game on earth, and we get the eternal win!

NOW WHAT?

Reread Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38 with new eyes, thinking about the miracle of the virgin birth and Jesus' sinless nature.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2012, San Francisco's Matt Cain, Chicago White Sox's Philip Humber, and Seattle's Felix Hernandez all threw perfect games, marking the first time in baseball history that three occurred in one season.



DAY 5

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.

LUKE 2:6-7, ESV

The countdown is speeding along. There aren't many days left to cross off on the calendar. The big day is almost here.

Christmas is coming!

By now, you are probably waist deep in all the festivities and buzz of the holiday season—carols, parties, decorating, tree trimming, gift wrapping, candy cane licking, and so forth. It's a wild, wacky, and wonderful time of the year!

It's also appropriate to take some time to think about the glories and blessings of Jesus' birth.

You've probably read today's Scripture passage many times before. The Christmas story—the baby in the manger, the swaddling cloths, the angels, the shepherds, the wise men—is probably as familiar to you as the stories of Bilbo Baggins, Peter Pan, and the Wizard of Oz.

But it's no fairy tale.

Jesus' birth shouldn't be celebrated each Christmas merely as a tradition, like making gingerbread houses or watching *A Charlie Brown Christmas* on TV. Jesus' birth is real history that can change your life!

WHAT'S IT MEAN?

The story of Jesus' birth should amaze you whether you're reading it for the first or the five hundredth time. God actually became a man! We call this the incarnation. Two thousand years ago in Bethlehem, God's eternal Son—the Second Person of the Holy Trinity—took on flesh to be born as a baby boy, fully human and fully God.

Despite all his eternal glory, majesty, and power, Jesus humbled himself

and came to earth. He willingly endured all the trials and tribulations of life in a sinful, fallen world, although he never sinned. Eventually, he gave himself over to wicked men to be whipped, beaten, spat upon, mocked, and crucified. He did all this because he loves you dearly—because you desperately needed a Savior.

Jesus' birth is one of the greatest miracles the world has known. So don't become bored or too familiar with it! Let its mystery and magnificence take your breath away again and again this Christmas season!

NOW WHAT?

Plan to read the Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth (Matthew 1–2 and Luke 2) several times before Christmas.

DID YOU KNOW?

Christmas has its origins in ancient pagan winter solstice festivals that predate Jesus' birth. Christians started observing a December holiday celebrating Jesus' advent in the fourth century AD.



DAY 6

The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

LUKE 1:28, NIV

Mary was speechless. Was she dreaming? Was her imagination running wild? Did she need to find the best neurologist in Nazareth to check her for hallucinations?

No, the dazzling angel standing before her was real.

Gabriel, the angelic messenger, sensed Mary’s fear. So he reassured her: “Don’t be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus” (Luke 1:30-31).

After thousands of years, God’s plan of salvation was nearing its climax. The eternal Son of God was about to arrive on earth in human form and die for humanity’s sins. And he was going to do it with the help of a young, very ordinary Jewish girl.

WHAT’S IT MEAN?

Mary had found God’s favor. But how?

She wasn’t rich, famous, or powerful—God isn’t impressed with those things anyway. And even though she was a humble, godly young woman (Luke 1:46-48), she was also a sinner. The Bible is clear that everyone sins (Romans 3:23), and sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2). So why did God bless Mary with the incredible honor of giving birth to the Savior of the world?

Ultimately, it was God’s grace.

Grace, by definition, is unmerited favor. It’s getting something good that we don’t deserve. As sinners, we deserve punishment and death (Romans 6:23). Any good gift we receive otherwise is because God delights in showering us with love and grace.

Mary knew this. After Gabriel’s departure, she celebrated God’s grace with a song (Luke 1:46-55). “The Mighty One has done great things for

me,” she sang. “Holy is his name!” (verse 49, NIV). Notice her emphasis on God’s grace, not her credentials.

Like Mary, you, too, have received God’s amazing grace. It’s the reason, in fact, he has led you to read a devotional about his Son. But that’s only one example. Do you have a Bible? Do you go to a gospel-centered church? Has anyone shared the Good News of Jesus with you before? Are spiritual questions stirring in your heart? All of this is God’s grace to you!

God could have left you to die in your sins. Instead, he is revealing to you his Son, who can give you new life!

NOW WHAT?

Read the Magnificat, Mary’s famous song of praise to God, in Luke 1:46-55. May we respond to God’s grace in similar ways!

DID YOU KNOW?

The angel Gabriel also spoke to Daniel, the Old Testament hero, more than 500 years before he appeared to Mary! (See Daniel 8 and 9.)



DAY 7

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”

LUKE 2:13-14

So what’s the deal with burning sofas?

In recent years, there seems to be a growing trend of sports fans who set sofas ablaze to celebrate their team’s big win. University of Maryland basketball fans lit the couches in 2005 after the Terps upset rival Duke during the regular season. Kentucky basketball fans did it both in 2012 and 2014 after the Wildcats beat their own hated rival, Louisville, in the NCAA tournament. And Michigan State football supporters joined the fiery festivities after the Spartans beat Ohio State for the Big Ten championship in 2013.

All things considered, it’s a pretty odd way to celebrate.

We love commemorating historic moments (hopefully without flaming furniture). But there has never been a bigger moment than that glorious night in Bethlehem about 2,000 years ago.

WHAT’S IT MEAN?

When the Son of God was born, heaven itself exploded into a huge party! Today’s Scripture passage in Luke 2 describes how the evening sky in Bethlehem lit up with innumerable angels, all singing God’s praises. The shepherds who witnessed this hurried to the manger and then spread the word around town (Luke 2:17).

Eight days later, two devout God-fearers named Simeon and Anna, who had been waiting their whole lives to see the Savior, rejoiced when Joseph and Mary brought baby Jesus to the Jerusalem Temple (Luke 2:25-38). Sometime later, the wise men arrived with kingly gifts to worship young Jesus (Matthew 2:1-12).

Jesus’ birth changed history. It was a life preserver thrown to a world

drowning in sin. It was a powerful beacon of hope piercing the darkness of Satan's domain. It was cause for great celebration.

Jesus' birth should cause us to worship and praise God too! The same joy that the angels, shepherds, and others expressed at the Savior's coming should be ours as well.

(But please, no sofa burning.)

NOW WHAT?

Celebrating Jesus' birth should go beyond the Christmas season. Make a point in your prayers throughout the rest of the year to thank Jesus for coming to earth to save us.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Bible never says there were three wise men, only that three gifts were given to Jesus. And these men probably visited Jesus at his home when he was a toddler, not the manger at his birth (Matthew 2). Don't let man-made Christmas traditions inform you more than Scripture itself!



DAY 8

The hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes—so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.

MATTHEW 13:15

Nobody likes a party pooper.

A party pooper is someone who ruins a good time. He's the guy who sits in a corner mumbling about how sugar rots your teeth while everyone else is eating Christmas cookies. She's the girl who wants to stay home and do homework while everyone else goes caroling. They don't realize a good thing when it comes along.

The Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day were big-time party poopers. While plenty of people rejoiced at the Savior's birth, the priests, scribes, and Pharisees did not. In fact, when King Herod—the wicked, Roman-appointed ruler of Palestine—heard rumors about a “newborn king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2) and asked the religious leaders where the child was to be born, they nonchalantly quoted the Micah 5:2 prophecy about Bethlehem . . . and that's it. The Bible says nothing about them sending someone to investigate Jesus' birth—or doing anything about it, for that matter.

God's people had been waiting thousands of years for the promised Messiah. Why didn't the religious leaders do something about it?

Their hearts were hardened.

WHAT'S IT MEAN?

Having a hard heart means you are unreceptive and defiant toward God. It means you don't want to listen to him or obey him.

Sadly, the next generation of Israel's religious leaders that came to power during Jesus' adulthood was no different than the one during the time of Jesus' birth. These leaders fought and argued with Jesus constantly. They

dismissed his miracles and denied his deity. Not even Lazarus's resurrection softened their hearts toward the Messiah.

So in Mathew 13, Jesus quoted Isaiah 6:9-10—a long-ago condemnation of Old Testament Israel's unbelief—to describe the Jewish leaders of the first century AD. They were no different than the faithless people of Isaiah's era.

May we never be party poopers when it comes to Jesus! May we never have hard hearts that reject God's Son. Instead, let's rejoice like the angels, shepherds, and wise men at our Savior's coming and worship him!

NOW WHAT?

Say a prayer of praise to Jesus for coming to save you from your sins.

DID YOU KNOW?

Although the Romans ruled Palestine in Jesus' day, Rome still allowed the Jews to practice Judaism and gave positions of authority to certain individuals. That's why the Jewish religious leaders had enough influence to eventually convince Pilate to crucify Jesus.



DAY 9

The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.”

LUKE 2:10, NIV

“Joy to the World” is one of the most popular and beloved Christmas carols of all time. During the holiday season, you can hear it everywhere—in churches, on the radio, in shopping malls, from carolers, and more. You probably know the lyrics by heart.

But did you know that Isaac Watts, the song’s writer, never intended it to be a Christmas carol? It’s true! In fact, the lyrics don’t mention anything about Bethlehem, the manger, angels, shepherds, wise men, or anything else specifically about Jesus’ birth. Watts’s inspiration for his classic hymn was Psalm 98, an Old Testament song of praise extolling the kindness and power God showed to Israel.

But hey, “Joy to the World” still works great as a Christmas carol because both the song and Christmas are all about—you guessed it—joy! John the Baptist “jumped for joy” in the womb of Elizabeth, Mary’s relative, when pregnant Mary came to visit her (Luke 1:44). When the angel announced Jesus’ birth to the shepherds in Bethlehem, he said, “I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people” (today’s verse).

When Joseph and Mary took baby Jesus to Jerusalem shortly after his birth, a prophet named Simeon said, “This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but he will be a joy to many others” (Luke 2:34). And when the wise men saw the star over young Jesus’ home, “they were filled with joy” (Matthew 2:10).

Jesus’ birth is all about joy!

WHAT’S IT MEAN?

Joy is an unwavering state of delight, peace, and satisfaction in a person’s heart. It’s deep, meaningful happiness that doesn’t fade away. Jesus’ birth makes never-ending joy possible!

How? Because the little baby in the manger was the fulfillment of heaven's great salvation plan. Mary's infant son was the eternal Son of God made flesh, come to rescue humanity. The child born in Bethlehem that night would grow up to become the Savior of the world.

Jesus' birth and all the blessings he'd bring to the world were enough to make angels sing, shepherds come running, old men prophesy, and wise men travel great distances. Because of Jesus, we can experience freedom from sin, peace with God, a hope-filled existence, and everlasting life.

Jesus most certainly brings joy to the world!

NOW WHAT?

Read Psalm 98, the inspiration for "Joy to the World."

DID YOU KNOW?

Isaac Watts was an eighteenth-century preacher and theologian in England who wrote more than 500 hymns.



DAY 10

Behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

MATTHEW 2:1-2, ESV

So what's the deal with the wise men? Who were these mysterious travelers that visited young Jesus?

The Bible doesn't give a lot of specifics. But we can make some educated guesses based on several clues in Scripture.

Matthew 2:1 describes them as "wise men from the east," probably Persia (modern-day Iraq and Iran). The English term "wise men" comes from the word *magoi* in the New Testament's original Greek language. *Magoi*, or "Magi," means "magicians," "sorcerers," or "astrologers."

These were religious men who believed in enchantments and magic spells. They probably tried to predict the future by looking at the stars. They were fascinated by the spiritual realm but almost certainly did not worship the one true God of the Bible.

But something about that special star in the sky captured their attention. Perhaps they were familiar with prophecies about the Messiah, such as Numbers 24:17, through Old Testament scrolls left behind after the Jewish exile to Babylon nearly 600 years earlier. However it happened, they quickly connected the star to old prophecies about "the king of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2) and set off on their long journey to Israel.

When they finally arrived, Matthew 2:11 says, "They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him."

WHAT'S IT MEAN?

We'll never know if the wise men fully understood whom they were worshipping. But let's give these ancient pagan magicians credit: they followed God's calling and went to great lengths to worship Jesus.

They weren't the only ones. Angels, shepherds, and the prophets worshiped baby Jesus too. Many years later, so did fishermen, lepers, tax collectors, Samaritans, Roman centurions, convicted criminals, the blind, the sick, the crippled, and even a couple of religious leaders, too.

Is that your heart's desire this Christmas? Jesus doesn't care where you come from. He only wants your worship now.

No matter what's in your past or where you're at in life, take a cue from the wise men: seek Jesus and worship him this Christmas. Bend your knee to the Savior of the world. Bow down and acknowledge him as Lord. He is worthy of all your praise!

NOW WHAT?

Read the full story of the wise men in Matthew 2:1-12.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Greek word *magos* (singular form of *magoi*) is found only once more in Scripture—Acts 13, where it describes a wicked “false prophet” and “sorcerer” named Elymas who opposed the apostle Paul's missionary work.



DAY 11

Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

MATTHEW 2:11

The long wait is almost over. The moment you've anticipated all year comes tomorrow.

Christmas Day!

You've no doubt made your wish list. Maybe you even ranked the gifts you want in order—you know, just to make sure everyone is aware. Are your top three gift ideas gold, frankincense, and myrrh? Probably not.

Two thousand years ago, when the wise men finally reached the young Jesus' home, they "entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh" (today's verse).

Maybe the Magi's gifts to Jesus don't mean much to you today. But these costly items speak a great deal about the special child who received them.

WHAT'S IT MEAN?

Whether or not the wise men realized it, their expensive gifts symbolized Jesus' unique roles as King (gold), High Priest (frankincense), and Savior (myrrh).

I'd better explain . . .

Gold is the obvious one. In ancient times, gold was often a symbol of royalty and the measure of a kingdom's greatness. King Solomon, for instance, was renowned for his wealth and gold (1 Kings 10:14-23). The Magi's gift of gold symbolized Jesus' kingship because he is the "King of all kings and Lord of all lords" (Revelation 19:16) who will one day return to earth to destroy all evil and inaugurate his eternal kingdom.

Frankincense was a type of incense made from tree resin that the Israelites used in Tabernacle ceremonies (and later, at the Temple). Priests would burn this sweet-smelling substance on an altar in the Holy Place as an offering to God (Exodus 30:34-37). The gift of frankincense symbolized Jesus' role as our High Priest who became the ultimate sin-sacrifice to God on our behalf. As Hebrews 10:12 says, Christ is "our High Priest [who] offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time."

Myrrh was used as a fragrant spice to embalm dead bodies before they were entombed. John 19:39-40 describes how Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea covered Jesus' body with myrrh-laced ointment after taking it off the cross. The gift of myrrh foreshadowed Jesus' death and resurrection as our loving Savior!

This Christmas, follow the example of the wise men and worship Jesus as your King, High Priest, and Savior!

NOW WHAT?

Worship Jesus today with the sacrifices of prayer and singing.

DID YOU KNOW?

Apparently, myrrh could be used in drinks. During his crucifixion, Jesus was offered wine mixed with myrrh to dull his pain, but he refused (Mark 15:23).



DAY 12

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

ROMANS 6:23

Merry Christmas!

Today is one of the most wonderful days of the year. On Christmas Day, the cares of life seem to get lost in the hustle and bustle of fun family events, annual traditions, good food, and, of course, gifts! All over the world, people of many different languages, nations, and cultures are exchanging gifts. It's pretty remarkable when you think about it. And let's be honest: it's just really fun to get stuff!

A gift, as defined by the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, is “something voluntarily transferred by one person to another without compensation.” In other words, it's a blessing someone gives you a gift out of love even though you did nothing to earn it.

Of all the gifts you'll receive this season, the greatest one is from God. It's his Son, Jesus.

WHAT'S IT MEAN?

Jesus is the greatest gift because of what he has done—and will do—for you. The movies and video games you get this Christmas will entertain you. The books you get will enlighten you. The clothes you get will keep you warm. But only Jesus can save you!

Your family gives you Christmas gifts out of love for you, not because you earned them. It's the same with God. He sent Jesus to earth as a gift to us, not a reward. We did nothing to earn Jesus. Zip. Zero. Zilch.

It's incredible that a holy God would provide his only Son to reconcile lost sinners like us to himself. But God doesn't stop there. When we trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, God lavishes on us innumerable blessings.

Here is a small sample of all the gifts that God gives us through faith in Christ:

- love (1 John 3:16)
- mercy (Ephesians 2:4-5)
- grace (Romans 5:15)
- peace (Romans 5:1)
- joy (Romans 5:2)
- hope (1 Thessalonians 1:3)
- the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49)
- adoption as God’s children (Galatians 4:4-7)
- access to God (Hebrews 4:16)
- fellowship with God (1 John 5:20)
- freedom from sin’s power (Romans 6:6-7)
- victory over Satan (1 John 3:8)
- eternal life (today’s verse)

Jesus, literally, is the gift that keeps on giving. The gifts under the Christmas tree will eventually fade away. But gifts that come from salvation through Jesus last a lifetime—and beyond!

NOW WHAT?

Take a break from your gifts today and thank Jesus for the gifts he provides through his great sacrifice.

DID YOU KNOW?

Many historians trace the Christmas tradition of gift giving back to the ancient Roman festival of Saturnalia.

