



A DAILY DEVOTIONAL FOR ADVENT 2022



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# THE ROAD TO **BETHLEHEM**

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INVITES BELIEVING  
COMMUNITIES TO  
ENGAGE PEOPLE  
GROUPS WHERE THE  
GOOD NEWS OF JESUS  
AND HIS KINGDOM IS  
NOT YET KNOWN.

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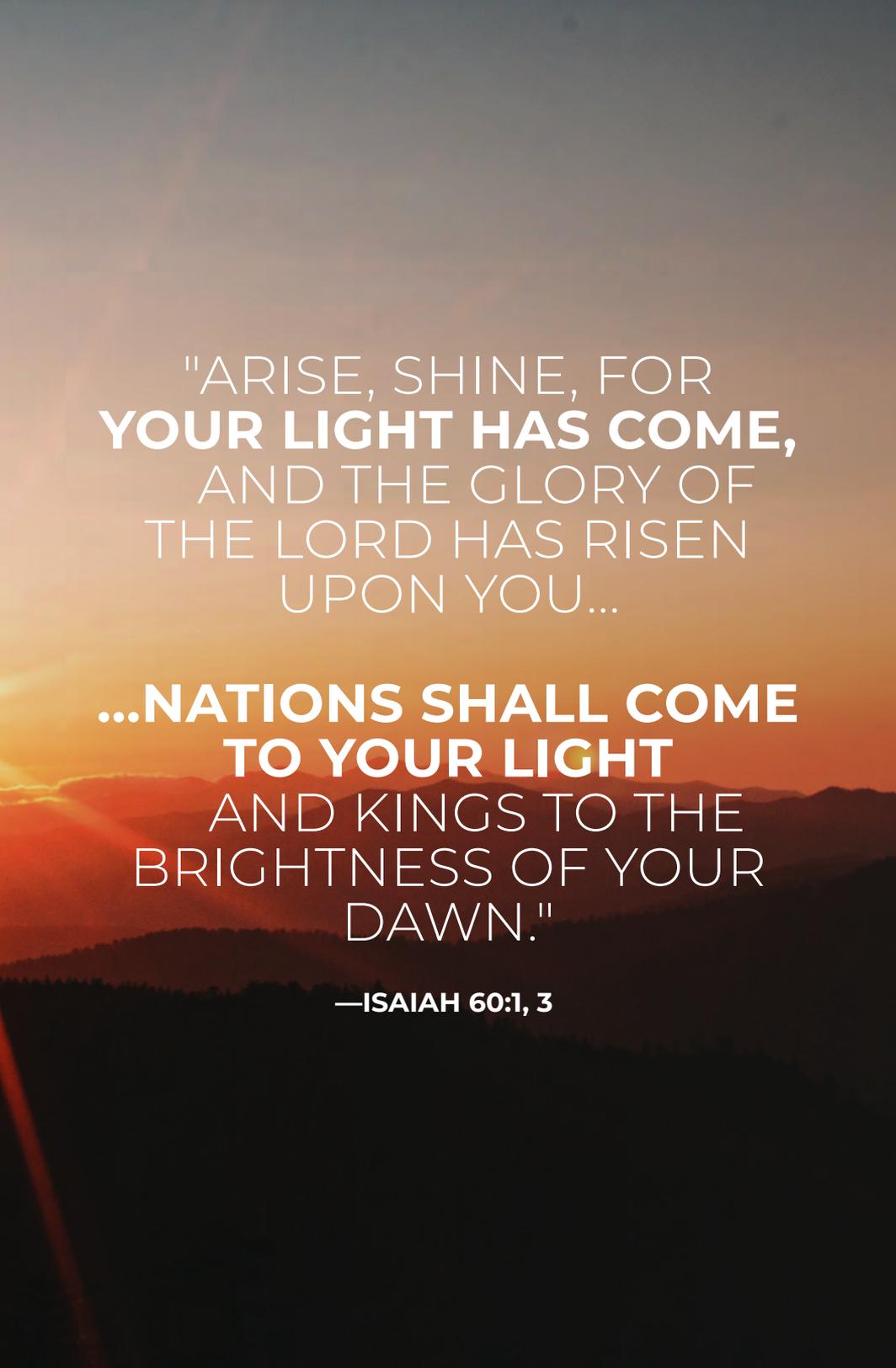
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*All Scripture is NRSV unless otherwise noted.*

*Some names have been changed for  
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"ARISE, SHINE, FOR  
**YOUR LIGHT HAS COME,**  
AND THE GLORY OF  
THE LORD HAS RISEN  
UPON YOU...

**...NATIONS SHALL COME  
TO YOUR LIGHT**  
AND KINGS TO THE  
BRIGHTNESS OF YOUR  
DAWN."

—ISAIAH 60:1, 3



"...LOOK FOR  
CHRIST, + YOU  
**WILL FIND HIM,**  
AND WITH HIM  
**EVERYTHING  
ELSE..."**

—C. S. LEWIS

During this time of the year, God invites us to immerse ourselves in the story of the incarnation. We ponder what it might have been like to travel alongside Joseph and Mary, to tend sheep the night an angel lights up the sky, or to be a donkey watching on as its feeding trough becomes the cradle for a newborn baby.

Frontier Fellowship's 2022 Advent devotional invites you into this ancient narrative of Christ's birth—along the literal and figurative *Road to Bethlehem*. Each week, we'll immerse ourselves in the beauty of Advent and the wonder of Immanuel through a particular figure in the story: those who prepared the way, those who were present at the Nativity scene, the supporting cast of characters and those who journeyed beyond Bethlehem.

Frontier Fellowship believes the Gospel is Good News for all people, including the more than two billion people worldwide who haven't yet had the opportunity to place themselves in this age-old story.

We pray this devotional will inspire your personal reflection this Advent season and deepen your love for least-reached peoples living on the frontier—those who have not yet encountered Jesus, Light of the World.



# WEEK 01:

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## PREPARE THE WAY

“THEREFORE THE LORD HIMSELF WILL GIVE YOU A SIGN. LOOK, THE YOUNG WOMAN IS WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON AND SHALL NAME HIM IMMANUEL.” —ISAIAH 7:14

The Bible tells an epic, sprawling story about God, the world and God’s intended future. As part of that story, prophets were given voice to sometimes praise, other times condemn, but always to remind the people of God’s presence and power to change the world. In Israel’s darkest moments, the prophets acknowledged that the world was not yet as God intended. God had a plan and would one day set all things right.

In the classic hymn “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus,” Charles Wesley describes the longing and expectation of a world waiting for redemption.

*“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.”*

From the very beginning, Christians claimed that Jesus was the Messiah—anticipated by the Old Testament prophets, arriving as the fulfillment of Israel’s scriptures. This is what God’s people had been waiting for. This is what the world still waits for today. Advent is about two “arrivals” of Jesus: the first, which we celebrate on Christmas; the second, when He returns to re-create the world—God’s Kingdom come, on earth as in heaven.

**JOIN US THIS ADVENT AND BEYOND AS WE WAIT, WATCH AND PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD—PROCLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS UNTIL JESUS COMES AGAIN!**

“FOR A CHILD HAS BEEN BORN FOR US, A SON GIVEN TO US; AUTHORITY RESTS UPON HIS SHOULDERS, AND HE IS NAMED WONDERFUL COUNSELOR, MIGHTY GOD, EVERLASTING FATHER, PRINCE OF PEACE.” —ISAIAH 9:6

The prophet Isaiah lived in Jerusalem in the eighth century BC. At that time, Assyrians were invading the north, and God’s people longed for a Messiah, a Savior to come and rescue them. Isaiah’s prophetic words were full of hope: God was about to do something new—make a path through the wilderness and create rivers in the dry wasteland (Isaiah 43:19).

Centuries later, Jesus was born in a time and place dominated by the Roman Empire, with its coercive military presence and heavy system of taxation. Early Christians would have likely seen Isaiah 9’s prophecy reflected in Jesus. *After so many years of waiting, could this be the Messiah? Is God finally making a way?*

Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus. Yet, Advent reminds us that we live in the “now and the not yet,” a space in history where the people of God must actively wait for Him to set all things right again. Years ago, due to conflict and famine, our South Sudanese partners were displaced, along with millions of others in their nation. Not sure when or if they’d ever be able to return home, our partners asked God to show them how to minister within the refugee camps where they now lived in a neighboring country. God has used them in powerful ways to bring healing, comfort and provision to other displaced peoples. Now, the doors are opening for them and fellow refugees to return home to South Sudan, where our partners are excited to continue sharing the Gospel with least-reached peoples.

More than two billion people around the globe still yearn for transformation and renewal in their lives but don’t yet know the hope or love of Jesus. You might be waiting for God to make a way in a seemingly impossible circumstance, too. Reflect on Jesus—Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Ask Him to show you His presence in new ways as you wait this Advent. Pray that the Good News of His Kingdom would soon come to least-reached peoples worldwide.

# MICAH

DAY  
**03**

TUESDAY  
NOVEMBER 29

“BUT YOU, O BETHLEHEM OF EPHRATHAH, WHO ARE ONE OF THE LITTLE CLANS OF JUDAH, FROM YOU SHALL COME FORTH FOR ME ONE WHO IS TO RULE IN ISRAEL, WHOSE ORIGIN IS FROM OF OLD, FROM ANCIENT DAYS.” —MICAH 5:2

If Isaiah is the prophet of big-city Jerusalem, then his contemporary, Micah, is the prophet of the small, rural towns. Micah was a blue-collar member of the laboring class in the village of Moresheth, about twenty-five miles southwest of the great city of Jerusalem.

Micah had a heart for the poor and dispossessed. He held Jerusalem's elite accountable for the ways they took financial advantage over his rural neighbors, causing them much suffering. Who better, then, to deliver the good news that a great ruler would emerge—a peasant Messiah from Bethlehem, birthplace of David, the shepherd-turned-king of God's people?

God never overlooks the lesser-known places—fishing villages, farms and watering holes—the seemingly insignificant places where God chooses the most unlikely candidates to carry out His mission in the world.

In an outlying village in Indonesia, Asmara—a Muslim woman—was anxious about her pregnancy. She visited a free health clinic hosted by followers of Jesus. The medical team examined her, offering reassurance that her pregnancy was normal. With her permission, they prayed in Jesus' name that her anxiety would be relieved. She returned home and safely delivered her child some months later.

Asmara believed Jesus carried her through the pregnancy and wanted to learn more about Him. After finding a Christian who explained who Jesus is, she chose to follow Christ. Now, Asmara leads discipleship groups in her least-reached community. Through God's faithfulness and her obedience, dozens of people in this remote region have decided to follow Jesus!

If Jesus can show up in a place like Bethlehem, He can show up anywhere: in Indonesia's farthest islands, remote mountain villages in Central Asia and the Himalayas, desert regions of the Middle East, the poorest communities of South Asia—everywhere the Gospel is yet to be heard!

“WHEN ELIZABETH HEARD MARY’S GREETING, THE BABY IN HER WOMB LEAPED. SHE WAS FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND SANG OUT... ‘YOU’RE SO BLESSED AMONG WOMEN, AND THE BABE IN YOUR WOMB, ALSO BLESSED!’” —LUKE 1:41-42 (MSG)

Elizabeth, descendant of Aaron, was righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments. After years of barrenness, she was suddenly pregnant with the forerunner of the Messiah. What an overwhelming surprise, and a lot to process. Thank God she had her young cousin, Mary!

The two had so much to talk about—angelic visitations, holy words to ponder, their miraculous pregnancies. Together, they likely shared their excitement and fears, anxieties and insecurities. They could pray with, encourage and strengthen one another. During Advent, as we wait for Jesus to return, do we need to wait alone? Is it possible that God could surround us with holy friendships—people with whom we share and reflect, watch and wait?

In least-reached regions of the world, followers of Jesus are often few and far between. Holy friendships in these settings are a precious gift. Jane, a teacher at the Afghan Refugee Academy (ARA) in South Asia, was born into a Muslim family. She began to follow Jesus in her teens and suffered mightily for her faith, but a Bible study fellowship helped her grow and flourish. Jane now participates in an ARA Bible study for staff and students, where she and some of the girls share together about how Jesus' hope, joy and peace can help them navigate the concerns, anger and worry they experience as refugees and Christ-followers. This community of friends has provided vital encouragement for both students and teachers in a region of the world where it is difficult to be a follower of Jesus.

We all need people who will remind us that all things are possible with God, people who will encourage and strengthen us as we walk with Jesus. Reflect on some of the holy friendships you've experienced in your life. What made them meaningful? Consider ways God might use you to participate in holy friendships with followers of Jesus on the frontier.



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# ZECHARIAH

DAY  
05

THURSDAY  
DECEMBER 1

“BUT THE ANGEL SAID TO HIM, ‘DO NOT BE AFRAID, ZECHARIAH, FOR YOUR PRAYER HAS BEEN HEARD. YOUR WIFE ELIZABETH WILL BEAR YOU A SON, AND YOU WILL NAME HIM JOHN.’” —LUKE 1:13

Can you imagine a nine-month silent retreat? For some, a welcome gift. For others, excruciating. Zechariah had a lot of questions about his barren wife's pregnancy, so God offered him a season of silence, making him unable to speak until his child's birth. He had no choice but to silently ponder: the angel Gabriel's astonishing news, the years of waiting for a child, the silence of the prophets and God's own apparent silent retreat.

For four hundred years, one evil empire after another trampled Israel underfoot with no apparent response from God. All those years of unanswered prayer: for Zechariah, a son; for Israel, a Messiah. Imagine the disappointment, discouragement and despair. Perhaps you don't need to imagine it because you've experienced it.

Many of Frontier Fellowship's global partners have also experienced the discouragement of seemingly unanswered prayer. They labor tirelessly—day after day, year after year—waiting for their work to bear fruit, for the light of Christ to break through in the hearts of the people they serve.

During Advent, we wait in the dark, longing for the Light. We wait and watch for Jesus to right all wrongs, to draw not only us, but all peoples, to Himself, and answer once and for all our Advent prayer, “*Come, Lord Jesus!*” When Gabriel appears to Zechariah, God's long silence is broken. God is doing a new thing, and Zechariah's son—John—will prepare the way for the Lord, to give knowledge of salvation to His people.

This Advent season, in whatever unknowing you might find yourself, with whatever prayers are yet unanswered, God sends a word of hope: Don't give up. Wait and watch. Jesus is coming!

**GOD, HELP ME TRUST YOU WHEN I CAN'T SEE OR HEAR YOU.  
ENCOURAGE INDIGENOUS LEADERS ON THE FRONTIER AS  
THEY ALSO WAIT TO SEE YOUR KINGDOM COME.**

# THE ANGEL GABRIEL

“IN THE SIXTH MONTH THE ANGEL GABRIEL WAS SENT BY GOD TO A TOWN IN GALILEE CALLED NAZARETH, TO A VIRGIN ENGAGED TO A MAN WHOSE NAME WAS JOSEPH, OF THE HOUSE OF DAVID. THE VIRGIN’S NAME WAS MARY.” —LUKE 1:26-27

The first words of dialogue in Luke’s Gospel are spoken by the angel Gabriel to Zechariah: *“Do not be afraid”* (Luke 1:13). Later Gabriel will speak these same words to Mary (Luke 1:30). Jewish theologian Elie Wiesel once said that whenever an angel announces, *“Be not afraid,”* you’d better look out because a big assignment is on the way.

Mary, probably in her early teens, was busy living her life. She had chores to do, people to care for and a wedding ahead. And just like that, Gabriel appeared in her small town of Nazareth in Galilee and interrupted it all. *Dear Mary, favored one, I have some good news to share with you....*

Didn’t Gabriel understand that this news would put Mary at the center of a scandal, destroy her family’s social reputation, potentially sabotage her upcoming marriage and likely leave her a poor, destitute teenage mother?

After getting over her initial shock, and despite all the ways it would turn her life upside-down, Mary remarkably accepted God’s invitation through Gabriel—*“Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word”* (Luke 1:38). It is because Gabriel spoke a word from the Lord that Mary had an opportunity to respond.

Biblical scholar Raymond E. Brown reminds us that *“the gospel is not good news unless there is someone to hear it.”* Throughout Scripture, God uses messengers to share Good News, and He calls us to share in this work of proclamation through prayer, church planting, Bible translation and more.

**“...HOW ARE THEY TO BELIEVE IN ONE OF WHOM THEY HAVE NEVER HEARD? AND HOW ARE THEY TO HEAR WITHOUT SOMEONE TO PROCLAIM HIM?” —ROMANS 10:14-15**

Is there someone within your circles who needs to hear the Good News of God’s love? Will you be His messenger to them?

# THE SONG OF MARY

DAY  
07

SATURDAY  
DECEMBER 3

“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.” —LUKE 1:52-53 (NIV)

Mary's prophetic song, known as The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), is one of the oldest hymns of the Church. William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury (1942-4), called it a *“most revolutionary canticle.”* After all, it speaks of the powerful being brought down from their thrones and the lowly being lifted up. It speaks of the hungry being filled with good things and the rich going away empty. The song of Mary—an enduring anthem of God's coming Kingdom—continues to offer hope, encouragement and strength to anyone who has ever felt marginalized or oppressed.

Mary sounds very much like the prophets who came before her, with one distinction: she sings as one who bears in her womb the Son sent by God into the world. For centuries, the prophets cried out to God, *“Tear open the heavens and come down...”* (Isaiah 64:1). Now God was doing exactly that—becoming incarnate, entering the world as a human to redeem and save His people.

In Advent, we sing songs that help us look forward to something better than the violence, suffering and injustice around us. We sing because we long for *“peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!”* We sing because, in and through this marvelous Child, *“the weary world rejoices... chains shall He break, and in His name all oppression shall cease.”*

We also sing because a day is coming when we will join a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne in exuberant worship: *“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!”* (Revelation 7:10).

Take some time today to slowly read through the lyrics of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” one of the great Advent hymns of the Church. Read it as a prayer. How does it speak to you in your context? How might it speak to someone in a part of the world that has never heard of Jesus?



# WEEK 02:

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## THE NATIVITY STORY

“LONG AGO GOD SPOKE TO OUR ANCESTORS IN MANY AND VARIOUS WAYS BY THE PROPHETS, BUT IN THESE LAST DAYS HE HAS SPOKEN TO US BY A SON...” —HEBREWS 1:1-2

It's remarkable that God's daring plan to free the human race from sin—bringing His light, life and forgiveness—was not dependent upon a mighty show of force or intellectual prowess. Instead, it was embodied in the frame of a vulnerable infant and entrusted to the care and goodwill of a pregnant teenager, a small-town carpenter, a ragtag group of shepherds, and foreigners from a distant land. The Advent season is a good reminder that God can use anyone—even us—to fulfill His purposes in the world.

American author Madeline L'Engle, in her poem "The Risk of Birth," says this about the unlikely arrival of Jesus into the world:

*"When is the time for love to be born? The inn is full on the planet earth,  
And by a comet the sky is torn—Yet Love still takes the risk of birth."*

The night of Christ's birth, long ago in Bethlehem, was likely not posed, pretty or idyllic. Mary was probably exhausted and uncomfortable after labor and delivery, especially in an unfamiliar place far from home. Joseph might have kept himself busy attending to Mary's needs, checking on Jesus or shooing away curious goats and sheep. Add to that scene a group of shepherds, wide-eyed and maybe even still a bit scared out of their wits after having been recently visited by a host of angels.

Nothing about this scene was pristine, ordered, clean or regal. Silent night? Not likely. And yet, everything was perfect. The place God chose to become human was in the midst of chaos and imperfection, surrounded by a cadre of imperfect and flawed people.

As we turn our attention to the Nativity scene this second week of Advent, think about the unlikely characters God has used to impact your life. What was it about them that encouraged your faith? In what areas of life do you feel inadequate or lowly? How might God use you—in spite of or because of your frailty—to participate with Him in His redemptive work in the world?

“...JOSEPH, SON OF DAVID, DO NOT BE AFRAID TO TAKE MARY AS YOUR WIFE, FOR THE CHILD CONCEIVED IN HER IS FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT...YOU ARE TO NAME HIM JESUS, FOR HE WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS.” —MATTHEW 1:20-21

Joseph, born in Bethlehem, was a righteous man in the line of King David. His account appears at the beginning of Matthew’s Gospel against the backdrop of an incredible dream, and then he essentially disappears, save for a couple of brief appearances during Jesus’ childhood. Joseph doesn’t even have a speaking part in the Bible. Not one word.

We do know that when Joseph is visited by an angel, like Mary, he says “yes” to God. He does not dismiss Mary quietly, as would have been expected. Instead, he comes alongside her, joining the scandal and shame of her mysterious pregnancy. He commits his life to her and Jesus, and to whatever the future will hold.

What can we learn from a biblical character who has so little to say? Looking to his actions, Joseph appears to be one who faithfully listened to the Lord, followed God’s guidance and spent his life near to Jesus.

When it comes to God’s mission in the world, each of us is called to be like Joseph: people who faithfully listen for God’s voice, follow His directions and live in close proximity to Jesus. Some of us might find ourselves in the spotlight, serving God in more public ways. Many more of us will serve behind the scenes—through prayer, generous giving, words of encouragement, the ministry of presence and more.

What are some of the ways God has invited you to faithfully follow Him? How might God use your unique gifts, experiences and skills to help create Gospel access for those who have not yet heard the Good News? May you experience the nearness of Immanuel as you faithfully follow Christ!



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# THE MANGER

DAY  
10

TUESDAY  
DECEMBER 6

“WHILE THEY WERE THERE, THE TIME CAME FOR HER TO GIVE BIRTH. SHE GAVE BIRTH TO A SON, HER FIRSTBORN. SHE WRAPPED HIM IN A BLANKET AND LAID HIM IN A MANGER...” —LUKE 2:6-7 (MSG)

Not finding any room at the local Holiday Inn, Jesus is born in less-than-ideal circumstances, wrapped in bands of cloth, and laid in a manger. His parents had to make do with what they had on hand, and the manger was a much better alternative to the cold, hard ground. Its hay provided a soft cushion, the box was up off the ground and the sides were tall enough to keep Him safely snuggled inside.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city whose name literally means “house of bread.” How remarkable that into this *house of bread* is born the Bread of Life, laid in a feeding trough for animals.

Here at the manger—that place where Christ is born into the world—we find our spiritual food. For Frontier Fellowship's global partners, Christ's manger can take many forms: a church building or a living room, a bus or a fishing boat, an outdoor market, under a shade tree by the river, in public and in secret. It is remarkable the number of ways and places Christ can be found in the world feeding the spiritually hungry.

For one small Christian community in a rural Asian town, a cozy apartment two floors above the local police department serves as an unlikely “manger.” There, a dozen young followers of Jesus gather to worship, despite the threat and risk of imprisonment by local authorities, who are not friendly to the ways of Jesus. “*It is the place God has given us,*” says Maalik, one of its leaders, “*and the place where God feeds us every time we gather.*”

**THIS ADVENT SEASON, PRAY THAT FOLLOWERS OF JESUS ON THE FRONTIER WOULD EXPERIENCE CHRIST'S ABUNDANCE AND SUSTENANCE. ASK THAT LEAST-REACHED PEOPLES WOULD FIND MODERN-DAY "MANGERS" WHERE THEY CAN ENCOUNTER JESUS, THE BREAD OF LIFE. MAY EVERY HUNGRY HEART BE FILLED!**

# ANGEL OF THE LORD

“TODAY IN THE TOWN OF DAVID A SAVIOR HAS BEEN BORN TO YOU; HE IS THE MESSIAH, THE LORD. THIS WILL BE A SIGN TO YOU: YOU WILL FIND A BABY WRAPPED IN CLOTHS AND LYING IN A MANGER.”

—LUKE 2:11-12 (NIV)

The angel of the Lord gives God's very specific directions to the shepherds in Luke 2. David's town, newborn baby, swaddling cloths, manger...check! From their grazing fields outside of Bethlehem, they head into town under the starry sky and find everything "*just as they had been told*" (Luke 2:20).

God continues to speak today in specific ways, helping His followers introduce Jesus to least-reached peoples:

A Christian couple smuggled some Bibles into Iran but were nervous about handing them out. Stopping for gas one day during their travels, the wife said to her husband, "*Do you see that man leaning against the building over there? I think we're supposed to give him a Bible.*" He replied, "*You mean the one with the rifle in his hands? Are you kidding? I'm not going to approach him!*"

After wrestling with the Holy Spirit's surprising nudge, they eventually agreed to give the man a Bible. The husband retrieved one and held it out to the Muslim man. Leaning his rifle against the building, the man reverently took the Bible, held it to his lips and kissed it. Tearfully, he said, "*The book of life! Three days ago, I had a dream: a man in a white robe came to me and said, 'Come to this place and wait right here, and somebody will give you the book of life.'*" The Muslim man soon gave his whole heart to Jesus.

How wonderful it is when God gives specific directions to His followers and to people who don't yet know Jesus, guiding them to the right place at the right time to share or receive Good News.

To whom is God sending you? Whom might God be sending to you? How might this story change your interactions with strangers? When the Holy Spirit nudges you to share your faith, how do you think you will respond?



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“...THERE WERE SHEPHERDS LIVING IN THE FIELDS, KEEPING WATCH OVER THEIR FLOCK BY NIGHT...THE ANGEL SAID TO THEM, ‘DO NOT BE AFRAID, FOR SEE, I AM BRINGING YOU GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY FOR ALL THE PEOPLE...” —LUKE 2:8, 10

In the Bible, shepherding was a common occupation. At the time of Christ's birth, shepherds were some of the least-admired people in society. They were likely rough and renegade, and weren't considered especially holy. Some people even believed that being a shepherd was God's punishment for their ancestors' unfaithfulness (Numbers 14:33), or despised shepherds because they were ritually unclean. It was a lonely, hard life.

The Reverend Philip Prasad was born into poverty in 1937 as a Dalit, a marginalized people group in India. In 1984, the Good News of Jesus found its way to him, changing him forever. He devoted the rest of his life to introducing other Dalits to Jesus. People ground down by centuries of bias—seen as worthless, defiled and vulnerable—began finding new life and hope in Jesus. Eventually, Exodus Christian Presbyterian Church was established, the first indigenous Church among the Dalit people. Thanks to the vision and passion God gave Philip, more than two million Dalits have since come to know the love of God and now follow Jesus.

The angel's message to the shepherds did not announce good news for *some*. It was good news of great joy for *all* people—including them! *Your Savior has been born today!* After finding the child, the shepherds couldn't wait to tell everyone. “...*And all who heard it were amazed...*” (Luke 2:18). Isn't it just like God to choose those considered to be some of the lowest members of society to be the first to carry the Good News of His Kingdom into the world?

The Good News that the shepherds heralded more than two thousand years ago is still Good News today. Yet, many on the frontier still do not have access to the Gospel in their heart language. Pray that Bible translation efforts around the world would be fruitful and that *all people* would soon have an opportunity to hear and respond to the message of Jesus!

“...BUT MARY KEPT ALL THESE THINGS IN HER HEART AND THOUGHT ABOUT THEM OFTEN.”  
—LUKE 2:19 (NLT)

Mary had so much to ponder on that holy night in Bethlehem: angelic visitations, an unexpected pregnancy and a new husband, not to mention the joy, pain and exhaustion of the birth of her first child. Imagine Mary looking down at her baby's little fingers and toes, pondering the angel's words reported by the shepherds, *“to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord”* (Luke 2:11).

She might have asked, *“How could this have possibly happened to me? How in the world could I have possibly earned God's favor?”*

The answer, Mary, is simple: absolutely nothing. Most likely, God looked upon Mary with favor because it is God's nature to do so. His abundant, unmerited grace overflows from His loving heart and is given to us as a gift.

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast”* (Ephesians 2:8-9). Many of the world's religions—including Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam—emphasize a belief that the only way to reach their desired afterlife is through hard-earned human effort. *If I only say enough prayers, spin enough wheels, walk enough steps, fast enough days, give enough money...then I will have favor with my god(s).*

Imagine the fear, anxiety and stress of never knowing if you've done enough to earn God's favor and receive His love. Have you ever struggled to receive God's grace in your own life? Ask God to expand your capacity to accept His mercy and love. Pray that the world's least-reached peoples would soon receive the gift of God's grace through Jesus with open hearts.



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“...ABOUT THAT TIME SOME WISE MEN FROM EASTERN LANDS ARRIVED IN JERUSALEM, ASKING, 'WHERE IS THE NEWBORN KING OF THE JEWS? WE SAW HIS STAR AS IT ROSE, AND WE HAVE COME TO WORSHIP HIM.'” —MATTHEW 2:1-2 (NLT)

The “*wise men from eastern lands*” referred to in Matthew's Gospel were curious and adventuresome seekers. They were members of ancient Persia's priestly caste—known as *magi*—and were probably scholars and astronomers. As such, they immediately knew something incredible was happening when they saw a new star rise and settle in the night sky.

After many months and miles of travel, the wise men found the Christ child. They bowed down before Him and offered the precious gifts they had packed for this special occasion—gold, frankincense and myrrh. Seekers became worshipers somewhere along the road to Bethlehem.

Scripture doesn't tell us that any Jewish priests or teachers of the law came to visit the Christ child. Instead, it was a group of Gentiles—strangers from a foreign land—who recognized the signs foretold by the prophets and came to pay homage to the King of the Jews. At their core, the wise men were inquirers. Unhindered by borders and boundaries, they were determined to find answers to their main question: “*Where is the child...?*” Trusting in prophecies unseen yet pointed to, they followed the star and found who they were looking for: Jesus.

Many people living on the frontier today are also inquirers—curious seekers searching for answers to the world's big questions. Frontier Fellowship's partners on the Arabian Peninsula are actively fielding questions like these from inquiring Muslims in their region. They are often able to share about the wonder of God's love through Immanuel. As a result of their conversations, an overwhelming number of people have turned to faith in Jesus, and our partners have planted churches in this least-reached region specifically designed for Muslim-background believers!

What questions do you have about faith, and whom can you turn to in order to help you find answers? What precious gifts do you want to offer to the Lord as an act of worship this Advent season?



# WEEK 03:

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## SUPPORTING CAST

“PRAISE THE LORD FROM THE EARTH...WILD ANIMALS AND ALL LIVESTOCK...KINGS OF THE EARTH AND ALL PEOPLE...LET THEM PRAISE THE NAME OF THE LORD.” —PSALM 148:7-13 (NLT)

In 1970, Robertson Davies popularized the term “Fifth Business” in his novel by the same name. He describes Fifth Business in this way:

*“Those roles which, being neither those of Hero nor Heroine, Confidante nor Villain, but which were nonetheless essential to bring about the recognition or the denouement, were called the Fifth Business in drama and opera companies organized according to the old style; the player who acted these parts was often referred to as Fifth Business.”*

Over the past week, we focused on some of the well-known characters surrounding Jesus in the Nativity story. As we enter the third week of Advent, our attention turns to the supporting cast—those people and creatures outside the bright lights of center stage. Some of them are not actually seen in the biblical narrative itself but can be assumed; others play an important, but not always starring, role.

How, for example, are the women and unnamed characters in Jesus’ genealogy important to the story? Have you ever considered Mary and Joseph’s fellow travelers on the road to Bethlehem? Who might have been there to witness Jesus’ birth? Who answered the door in Bethlehem when Joseph knocked? It’s good to be reminded that if these supporting cast members played a vital role in the story of Jesus, then so do we.

**AS WE BEGIN TO LOOK DEEPER INTO SOME OF THESE MORE OBSCURE, SEEMINGLY LESS IMPORTANT FIGURES, WE BEGIN TO NOTICE DETAILS WE MIGHT HAVE OVERLOOKED BEFORE—DETAILS THAT HELP US BETTER COMPREHEND THE BIGGER PICTURE OF GOD’S LOVE FOR THE WORLD.**

# JESUS' GENEALOGY

“AN ACCOUNT OF THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF DAVID, THE SON OF ABRAHAM.” —MATTHEW 1:1

If someone were to ask you to tell the story of Jesus, where would you start? The New Testament begins, “*the story of the origin of Jesus Christ*” (Matthew 1:1, paraphrased). Matthew's genealogy begins with Abraham and spans God's redemptive history leading up to the birth of Jesus.

Jesus' family tree includes saints and sinners, liars, betrayers, idolaters, murderers, power-seekers and a curious collection of unknown people whose stories were evidently not important enough to make it into the biblical record (Matthew 1:1-17).

Also included in the genealogy are five women. There is Tamar, a Canaanite outsider who seduced her father-in-law, Judah, in order to bear a child (Genesis 38). Rahab, another outsider from Canaan and a prostitute, offered protection to Israelite spies, making the conquest of Jericho possible (Joshua 2). Following her husband's death—and facing an uncertain future—Ruth (a Moabite foreigner) boldly asked Boaz for protection and provision. Their child was the grandfather of King David (Ruth 3). Bathsheba—named in the genealogy only through her husband, Uriah, a Hittite whom David had slain—was the victim of David's lust (2 Samuel 11).

These women had histories that contained elements of tragedy, scandal or scorn. They were also God's instruments in continuing the sacred line of the Messiah. Fittingly, they introduce the final woman in Christ's genealogy: Mary, the mother of Jesus, whose own history was extraordinary.

The stories behind Matthew's genealogy remind us that God uses everybody: known and unknown, noble and scheming, pure and impure, men to whom the world listened and women upon whom the world frowned. What surprises you about the people in Christ's lineage? Reflect on the people in your faith lineage who helped point you to Jesus. Imagine how God might use the surprising parts of your life story to impact the frontier.

# FELLOW TRAVELERS

DAY  
17

TUESDAY  
DECEMBER 13

“IN THOSE DAYS A DECREE WENT OUT FROM CAESAR AUGUSTUS THAT ALL THE WORLD SHOULD BE REGISTERED.” —LUKE 2:1

Mary and Joseph were quite likely in good company on the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Many of these unknown-to-us fellow travelers were probably also on their way to register for the census that had been decreed by Caesar Augustus. Others might have been visiting relatives for a special occasion—a wedding or funeral—or traveling for work.

We often imagine Mary and Joseph’s journey as a frighteningly solitary one. However, the 90-mile, week-long trek probably took place in the springtime and was likely a time of camaraderie and fellowship with fellow travelers—family, friends, acquaintances, strangers. Through the strength of their numbers, they would have offered one another protection from wild animals, bandits and other nefarious characters.

In our day, because of significant unemployment in their home countries, about one third of Central Asian men and women must travel to other nations to earn money to support their families. Most Central Asians are Muslims, but some follow Jesus. As they journey, they seek fellowship and support among other migrants. Children remain back at home, without one or both parents. Extended families and close friends do the best they can to care for the children left behind. On both ends of these journeys, Frontier Fellowship partners share the Good News of Jesus with travelers on the road and families back home, planting seeds that grow into flourishing communities of faith among least-reached peoples.

**CONSIDER YOUR ROLE IN CARING FOR OTHERS, EVEN THOSE YOU DON'T KNOW WELL. WHOM CAN YOU INVITE INTO YOUR COMMUNITY IN A NEW WAY? HOW CAN YOU CARE FOR OTHERS ON THEIR JOURNEY AND ALLOW OTHERS TO CARE FOR YOU ON YOURS?**

“WHILE THEY WERE THERE, THE TIME CAME FOR HER TO DELIVER HER CHILD.” —LUKE 2:6

We tend to imagine Mary and Joseph all alone, huddled in a stable welcoming Jesus into the world. Yet, as with much of the tradition, the reality might have been quite different. For example, they likely had a midwife and possibly even extended family members there to help with the birth.

Midwives play an important role in the Bible. In Exodus 1, Shiphrah and Puah, two Hebrew midwives, saved babies born to the Israelites in captivity. To curb the growth of the Hebrew people, Pharaoh had ordered the midwives to kill all Hebrew baby boys during their births. Shiphrah and Puah refused to comply and were honored by God.

Midwives intercede at the threshold between the darkness of the womb and the light of a new type of life. They facilitate this transition with skill and healing—soothing and coaxing babies into the world. So too, the road to faith often comes through the encouragement of another.

Childbirth is still dangerous business in many places. Every day throughout the world, more than 800 women die in childbirth, mostly from preventable causes. In rural Central Asia, Rise Development (Rise) is actively working to lower these statistics in their community by offering classes to women and men, covering basic health, pregnancy, birth, newborn care and more. These courses raise community awareness to the needs of maternal and infant health care, while working to lower significantly high rates of maternal and child mortality. Rise's work is directly impacting life in a struggling region and creating opportunities for their Christian staff to share the Good News of Jesus with least-reached peoples.

Like Shiphrah and Puah, brave followers of Jesus today continue to safeguard and usher in new life as they boldly share the Gospel. Pray for individuals and organizations like Rise who are working toward the holistic flourishing of their communities through the transformative power of Jesus!



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# INNKEEPER

DAY  
19

THURSDAY  
DECEMBER 15

“AND SHE GAVE BIRTH TO HER FIRSTBORN SON AND WRAPPED HIM IN BANDS OF CLOTH, AND LAID HIM IN A MANGER, BECAUSE THERE WAS NO PLACE FOR THEM IN THE INN.” —LUKE 2:7

How might cultural insights impact our experience of the Christmas story? Middle East scholar Kenneth Bailey, in his book *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, draws our attention to some of the ways Jesus' birth narrative likely differed from our 21st-century understanding.

As a son of Bethlehem, Joseph would have had many relatives in town, ready and willing to host him and Mary on their visit—especially as she was about to give birth. In those days, a typical village house consisted of two rooms: a main room (where the family cooked, ate and slept) with an alcove for keeping the animals safe at night, and a guest room that remained empty unless the family had visitors.

Like some scholars, Bailey understood the “inn” (*katalyma* in Greek) to be a household's guest room rather than a commercial inn. In that case, Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem and were received into a relative's or friend's private home. Because other visitors already occupied the guest room, the Holy Family was lodged in the stable area of the family's main room, where Jesus would soon be born.

This picture is vastly different from a typical Christmas pageant depicting a gruff innkeeper shouting, “*No room at the inn!*” Gracious hospitality, then and now, is a central practice of many cultures.

South Asian communities surround visitors from near and far with kindness, often opening their homes to travelers from neighboring cities and nations. Frontier Fellowship vision trip participants share that they are humbled and awed by the lavish gatherings that are prepared in celebration of their visit, an overwhelming expression of generosity and welcome.

How can these pictures of hospitality infuse your appreciation of the story of Jesus' birth, inspiring you to welcome others into your life and home? Who in your community might need welcome this Advent season?

## OX + DONKEY

“BEHOLD, YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU;  
HE IS JUST AND ENDOWED WITH SALVATION,  
HUMBLE, AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY,  
EVEN ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A DONKEY.”  
—ZECHARIAH 9:9 (NASB1995)

When Jesus was born, it's likely that there were animals nearby, even in the very same room. None of these animals are mentioned in the Gospel accounts, but it seems appropriate for modern Nativity sets to include small figurines of oxen and donkeys—beasts of burden designed to carry heavy loads.

Throughout history and Scripture we see oxen and donkeys assisting humans in the hard labor of life, saddled with heavy objects or pulling plows to prepare fields for new crops. In fact, the Greek word for donkey translates to "an animal under the yoke."

We can't know for sure if there was an ox or a donkey present when Jesus entered the world. But if there was, it would have been abundantly fitting—the One who would bear the weight of the world's sins, honored by animals that have long borne the weight of others.

In Niger, oxen play a vital role in caring for marginalized communities. In the villages where Frontier Fellowship's partner Eglise Evangélique de la République du Niger (EERN) works, there is little access to medical care. EERN uses oxen and carts to transport injured or sick villagers to the closest doctors and hospitals. Additionally, oxen pull agricultural equipment on farms that help provide EERN's K-12 schools with healthy food and necessary supplies. In each of these applications, oxen help provide services that also create opportunities for church planters to share the Gospel with least-reached peoples.

Jesus reminds us that His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). He directly aligns Himself with oxen, donkeys and all those who find themselves laboring under heavy loads they cannot carry on their own. What in your life is too heavy to bear on your own? Offer it to Jesus! As you walk with Him, how might you help bear the burdens of others?

# HEROD

DAY  
21

SATURDAY  
DECEMBER 17

“WHEN HEROD SAW THAT HE HAD BEEN TRICKED BY THE MAGI, HE WAS INFURIATED, AND HE SENT AND KILLED ALL THE CHILDREN IN AND AROUND BETHLEHEM WHO WERE TWO YEARS OLD OR UNDER...” —MATTHEW 2:16

King Herod ruled over Judea with Roman approval for more than 30 years. Never truly accepted as king by the Jews, Herod was paranoid and prone to conspiracy theories. His successes were overshadowed by flailing grasps for fleeting power.

When Herod learned that a new king had been born for the Jews, he set a plan in motion to eliminate this new king and secure his control. He even oppressed his own people, allowing nothing to stand in the way of his reign. Unfortunately, history is riddled with stories of leaders who rule by way of fear and violence.

Around the world, followers of Jesus experience Herod-like obstacles in the form of coercive governments and restrictive laws that prevent them from worshipping freely. In fact, many of the world's least-reached peoples live in places where religious and political restrictions deter Gospel access. Despite the risks, brave Christians are sharing the Good News with their least-reached neighbors, and underground churches are flourishing.

In challenging contexts, Frontier Fellowship's global partners are helping the Church multiply and thrive. Pars Theological Centre (Pars) holistically cares for Persian-speaking Christians, providing opportunities to grow in faith, connect with Christian communities and heal from past trauma. In 2021, Pars' Counselling Centre provided more than 1,100 hours of therapy to Iranian and Afghan followers of Jesus, many of whom experience loneliness, anxiety, depression or PTSD.

Right now, more than 360 million Christians worldwide experience high levels of persecution and discrimination. To learn more about the places in the world where it's most difficult to follow Jesus, visit [opendoorsusa.org](http://opendoorsusa.org). Pray for the persecuted Church. Ask God to continue making a way for the Gospel to thrive, despite obstacles that might stand in the way.



# WEEK 04:

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## JOURNEY BEYOND

"NOW ALL GLORY TO GOD, WHO IS ABLE, THROUGH HIS MIGHTY POWER AT WORK WITHIN US, TO ACCOMPLISH INFINITELY MORE THAN WE MIGHT ASK OR THINK."

—EPHESIANS 3:20 (NLT)

The word *advent* means *coming* or *arrival*. When referring to Jesus' arrival, however, advent takes on a special meaning, representing both God's incarnation into the world *and* Christ's future return. Advent immerses us in this tension—the already and the not yet of God's Kingdom.

Just as Jesus' journey continues from Bethlehem, so our journey with Jesus continues and evolves. In this fourth and final week of Advent, we look ahead—leaning into the journey beyond the manger. As we trace the path of Jesus on the road to His public ministry, death and resurrection, we encounter those who celebrated, honored and welcomed Him.

The prophets of the Old Testament trusted in God's promises, eagerly awaiting the One who would redeem and restore Israel. God's prophetic witness continues today in the pages of our lives, as we too wait with expectation for Christ's triumphant return.

Dutch priest, author and theologian Henri Nouwen once said,

*"We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light. To you we say, 'Come, Lord Jesus!'"*

The journey beyond Bethlehem includes each of us! Frontier Fellowship's staff—along with our church partners and global partners—are just some of the myriad voices speaking the prophetic, hope-filled truth about Jesus.

**AS WE WATCH AND WAIT FOR THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST, WE REMEMBER THAT MORE THAN TWO BILLION PEOPLE TODAY DO NOT KNOW YET ABOUT HIS FIRST COMING. HOW CAN YOU PARTICIPATE IN MAKING GOD'S KINGDOM KNOWN AMONG LEAST-REACHED PEOPLES WORLDWIDE?**

“NOW THERE WAS A MAN IN JERUSALEM WHOSE NAME WAS SIMEON...IT HAD BEEN REVEALED TO HIM BY THE HOLY SPIRIT THAT HE WOULD NOT SEE DEATH BEFORE HE HAD SEEN THE LORD’S MESSIAH.”

—LUKE 2:25-26

Forty days after Jesus’ birth, His parents took Him to the temple in Jerusalem to perform purification rites, offer a sacrifice and present their firstborn son to the Lord—all in keeping with God’s law.

Like so many others, Simeon had waited his whole life for God to come and save Israel. One thing was unique for Simeon, though: God revealed to him that he would live to see the arrival of Israel’s long-awaited Messiah.

One day, God’s Spirit led Simeon to the temple courts and into the presence of the Holy Family. Upon seeing Jesus, Simeon immediately knew: *after all the waiting, the fulfillment had come—not only for God’s people Israel, but for the Gentiles as well.* Perhaps it was Mary who lifted Jesus into Simeon’s arms. Cradling the baby, he joyfully prayed:

*“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation...”* —Luke 2:29-30

Light of Hope Ministry Ethiopia (LOHME) knows a thing or two about waiting. For years, teams worked diligently to translate the New Testament into the Arsi Oromo dialect. After publishing it in 2014, they began translation work on the Old Testament, too. Years later, the entire Arsi Oromo Bible was finally complete, but the pandemic and Ethiopia’s civil war caused disappointing delays in printing and shipping it. But today, LOHME is celebrating, with the communities they serve, the recent delivery of this long-awaited translation. Praise God this Christmas for bringing the gift of Gospel access—for the first time—to the world’s 10+ million Arsi Oromo people!

Jesus promised that He would return one day to restore all things. Will that be in our lifetime? We do not know. Nevertheless, we wait and prepare, so that when He does arrive we will be ready to receive Him again. Have you been waiting a long time to see a promise of God fulfilled? May God grant you the faith and patience of Simeon as you wait and hope in Him.

# ANNA

DAY  
24

TUESDAY  
DECEMBER 20

"AT THAT MOMENT SHE CAME AND BEGAN TO PRAISE GOD AND TO SPEAK ABOUT THE CHILD TO ALL WHO WERE LOOKING FOR THE REDEMPTION OF JERUSALEM." —LUKE 2:38

Anna, a prophet, was widowed at a young age. Following her husband's death, she made herself at home in Jerusalem's temple, devoting decades of her life to unceasing worship, fasting and prayer.

Over the course of her many years at the temple, Anna would have met many faithful worshipers and witnessed a regular array of temple activities—times of celebration, grief, ritual and reverence.

Scripture doesn't indicate whether or not Anna was expecting to meet the Messiah the day she happened upon Simeon and the Holy Family on the temple grounds. No one is sure what compelled her to approach them, but the timing was perfect.

Albert, a church planter in Brazil, was headed up the Amazon River with his family to visit a village chief with whom he'd once shared the Gospel. Along the way, police stopped them, prohibiting them from going any further. Meanwhile, the village chief felt prompted to gather his warriors and head downriver. Approaching the police compound, they found Albert's family camped by the river. At the chief's insistence, Albert's family was allowed to continue their journey. They joyfully followed the chief and his warriors upriver, and shared the Gospel with the entire village during their visit. That community eagerly awaits their return, hungry to hear more about Jesus.

God's Spirit patiently, creatively and precisely orchestrates opportunities for people to encounter Jesus. When have you experienced God's unique and perfect timing in your life? Pray for God's divine timing to open many more doors of Gospel access for least-reached peoples to encounter Him.



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# EGYPTIAN HOSTS

“NOW AFTER THEY HAD LEFT, AN ANGEL OF THE LORD APPEARED TO JOSEPH IN A DREAM AND SAID, ‘GET UP, TAKE THE CHILD AND HIS MOTHER, AND FLEE TO EGYPT...’” —MATTHEW 2:13

The Gospel accounts of Jesus’ birth do not linger long in Bethlehem. Following the departure of the magi, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph with a divine warning: *Jesus’ life is in jeopardy. Flee to Egypt!*

At the time, Egypt was a land of refuge for those fleeing tyranny and oppression. It’s likely they would have encountered compassionate Egyptian hosts—women and men who welcomed, cradled and kept safe the infant King and His family.

These same Egyptian friends might have later helped the Holy Family load their camels and pack provisions when they felt it was safe enough to return to Nazareth. From there, Jesus would later launch His public ministry. This newfound Egyptian community pointed to Hosea’s prophecy: “...*out of Egypt, I called my son*” (Hosea 11:1).

Egypt is still cradling and sending the Gospel into the world. One of Frontier Fellowship’s partners, Jossour (“*bridges of hope*” in Arabic), is helping equip and launch Egyptian church planters into least-reached parts of Egypt and nearby nations. By mobilizing Egyptian and Arab congregations with a frontier mission vision and facilitating opportunities for involvement, they are increasing the Church’s capacity to respond to least-reached communities eager to hear the Good News of God’s Kingdom.

Fayez Ishak, one of Jossour’s leaders, recently said this about their ministry: “*Every small seed that was planted for the Kingdom with love and respect has resulted in an amazing harvest.*”

In caring for Jesus and His family, Egyptian hosts tended seeds of the Gospel that grew into an abundant harvest. Praise God for the ongoing fruitfulness of the Gospel in Egypt and beyond.



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# JOHN THE BAPTIST

DAY  
26

THURSDAY  
DECEMBER 22

"THIS IS THE ONE OF WHOM THE PROPHET ISAIAH SPOKE WHEN HE SAID, 'THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING OUT IN THE WILDERNESS: 'PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD; MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.'" —MATTHEW 3:3

Advent would not be complete without the peculiar character we call John the Baptist—the Advent sentinel crying out in the wilderness, "*Prepare the way of the Lord.*" John was rough around the edges. He wore clothing of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and (if you looked closely) you might see bits of locust and wild honey stuck in his beard. He's not portrayed—in Scripture or in our imaginations—as the warmest or most inviting biblical figure, and not the kind of person who would be warmly welcomed into most churches on a Sunday morning. He probably wouldn't show up there anyway, because John chose the wilderness as his pulpit and preached to anyone and everyone who dared to visit him there.

Of John, Luke's Gospel says this:

*"With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*  
—Luke 1:17

John was many things: a preacher, a firebrand of a prophet, the cousin and forerunner of the Messiah. But perhaps most centrally, John was a witness, and his job—his destiny—was to point away from himself and directly to Jesus. John Calvin called him the "*lantern, which shone in front of the Son of God.*"

John the Baptist preached a message of preparation. He encourages us to welcome and worship Jesus, while also accepting Christ's call to take up our crosses and follow where He leads. Amazingly, each of us is now emboldened with this same message—called and compelled to share it with a waiting world. How can you use your voice to make ready a path for Jesus' arrival?

"GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT" —MATTHEW 28:19

For many centuries, people like you and me have been invited to participate in God's redemptive story. Often to our surprise—and always undeserved—we have found ourselves linked arm in arm to a great cloud of witnesses. Looking back we recognize faces like Abraham and Esther, David and Mary Magdalene. There are the Apostles, Saint Augustine, Sojourner Truth, Dora Yu, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Bilquis Sheikh. Looking ahead, we see those still waiting to hear about a God who loves them so much that He drew near, taking the form of a child.

Every member of the global Church throughout history has at some point been called and compelled to join in the great mission of God throughout the ages—making the Good News of Jesus known among all peoples.

*"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* —Acts 1:8 (NLT)

It will take the whole church, with the whole Gospel, to reach the whole world. Today, more than two billion people worldwide still have not heard the name of Jesus. As members of Christ's body, we are called to participate—each of us fulfilling our own unique and specific role in God's story, until everyone has an opportunity to hear and respond to the Gospel.

How can you use what you have—gifts, talents, time, resources, prayers—to engage the frontier? How can you also encourage others to play their much-needed role in making Good News known to all peoples?



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“FOR THE GRACE OF GOD HAS APPEARED,  
BRINGING SALVATION TO ALL...” —TITUS 2:11

As we reach the end of our Advent journey and enter the joy of Christmas Eve, we reflect on a question our ministry partners around the world are often asked. *Why would God do something as outlandish as being born into this world as a helpless baby in a manger?* How would you answer?

Some years ago, *The Christian Century* magazine asked theologians to respond to another question. They asked, *“What is the Gospel in seven words?”* William Willimon, a bishop in the United Methodist Church, gave this response: *“God refuses to be God without us.”*

Does that not sound like Christmas—God getting personal in the form of a helpless child? The Christmas story tells us that God did not just come in Spirit, but in flesh and blood. A child who could be held and burped and rocked to sleep. A child who could wrap his tiny hand around his mother’s finger. He became Love personified—relentlessly pursuing us with His extravagant grace. Every character and theme in this Advent devotional points toward Jesus. He is the center; Israel’s dreams and hopes were fulfilled in Him, and so are ours.

This is Good News of great joy. Jesus came to earth—fully human, yet fully God—to reconcile all peoples to Himself through relationship with us. The arc of God’s story is one of covenant love and faithfulness. He pulls out all the stops to be with us—from manger to cross to empty tomb and resurrected life. We celebrate, knowing that one day He will come again. On that day people from every nation, tribe and tongue will gather in worship (Revelation 7:9). Every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11).

**IF SOMEONE ASKS YOU TO EXPLAIN THE GOSPEL IN SEVEN WORDS THIS CHRISTMAS SEASON, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY? THANK YOU, GOD, FOR REFUSING TO BE GOD WITHOUT US!**



# CHRISTMAS DAY

"THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND BLOOD, AND MOVED INTO THE NEIGHBORHOOD." —JOHN 1:14 (MSG)

Christmas is here—our Savior has come! We've spent some time this Advent season with a diverse cast of characters on the road to Bethlehem. In her litany "Nativity," author and liturgist Pat Bennett offers a prayer that expresses our willingness and desire to participate in Christ's work in the world. Join us in praying:

*"Incarnate Christ, be born in me this Christmas!*

*May my will be as Mary's, saying 'yes' to your ways; my mind as Joseph's, open to your unfolding revelation.*

*May my voice be as the angels', joyfully proclaiming Good News; my knees as the animals', quietly bent in adoration.*

*May my feet be as the shepherds', running eagerly to find you; my hands as the wise men's, offering up all that I have.*

*May my heart be as the manger, poor yet containing heaven's greatest treasure; my life as the stable, hallowed and expanded by your presence.*

*Incarnate Christ, be born again in me this Christmas!"*

We thank God for the ways He has inspired and encouraged you to deepen your frontier mission engagement this Advent. May you continue to grow in your love for and understanding of the world's least-reached peoples, until every nation, tribe, people and language has had an opportunity to hear and receive the Good News!

**MERRY CHRISTMAS!**



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